

**An Archdemon's
Dilemma: How
to Love Your Elf
Bride: Volume 8**

Fuminori Teshima

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ARCHDEMON'S
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ELF BRIDE

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The young girl looked
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**"Do not get overly
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*“Good day to you, Stern,
Mond, my dear Seraph
Hunters. How does it
feel to awaken?”*

The young girl leisurely
said, as she held ‘those’ up
and gave them a kiss.

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Prologue

Huh...? What... happened to me...?

Kuroka's thoughts were in a complete haze. Did she collapse? She could feel the cold sensation of the ground. Her limbs were languidly stretched out and felt heavy, as if there was no strength in them at all.

My ears... are fine. My nose... is as well.

She was unable to grip her cane without the use of her hands, but the senses that the blind Kuroka needed to get a grasp of her surroundings weren't damaged. However, her voice wouldn't come out. Judging from the smell, she was likely on some road in Kianoides. She could smell people, food, and the slightly damp ground. At the very least, she wasn't in the church.

The sound of traffic was a little far away. And that meant she was in an alleyway, or indoors somewhere. But by the fact that she could feel the presence of sunlight and wind, she must have been outside. And after recovering just a bit of her strength, she somehow managed to raise her head.

As expected, her senses truly were in disorder. She couldn't pinpoint what it was exactly, but she felt like her limbs didn't belong to her, as if they were someone else's altogether. She wasn't able to get up, and as she tried to squirm about, she noticed something in her hand. It was soft, and upon realizing that it was clothing, she turned somewhat pale. Was she actually wearing clothes right now?

My cane... where's my cane...?

Without her cane, she was unable to stand, walk and fully confirm the situation around her. However, the sensation in her fingertips was dull, it was questionable whether she would even be able to grip her cane if she had it.

"Huh...? Hey, is someone there?"

Kuroka's body stiffened up upon hearing that voice. The owner of said voice was a man. Kuroka was blind, and didn't even know if she was currently dressed. She didn't have any intention of casting aside her shame as a young girl in showing an unladylike appearance to others. And setting Kuroka's fears aside completely, the voice's owner just let out a carefree laugh.

"I was wondering what kind of ruckus was going on here, but it's just you, huh kitty cat? Did you get in a fight or something?"

The man spoke in a gentle voice and scooped up Kuroka's body.

She certainly was on the petite side, but it shouldn't have been possible for the average human to just pick her up so frivolously. The first ones to come to mind who could do so were sorcerers.

Kianoides had better public order than most places thanks to Archdemon Zagan, but it didn't change the fact that most sorcerers were villains. And as a cait sith, Kuroka was an exquisite catch for any sorcerer. Unable to move, though, she had no way of resisting. Her entire body stiffened up as the man stared fixedly at her face.

"Hm...? Hey, are you blind? That's not a fresh wound, huh? The fact that you've managed to survive means you're someone's pet cat then? Why are you out here?"

Unexpectedly, his voice truly did seem to contain concern for Kuroka's safety.

But isn't this person kind of talking to me like I'm a real cat...?

She thought she was just being teased when he first called her kitty cat, though...

After that, Kuroka noticed that the man's gaze suddenly focused on something else entirely.

"What's that? Clothes... right? Is it someone's laundry?"

Apparently Kuroka's clothes were scattered on the ground. She could feel the man shifting his gaze between the clothes and herself.

"It can't be... right? Ow, hey, don't scratch me, that hurts. I'm not gonna eat you."

Kuroka flailed her arms in the minimal show of resistance, but it was a pitifully powerless display. At the same time, she finally understood why her limbs didn't feel like her own.

It couldn't be... my body is...?

Kuroka was in complete despair, and the man simply carried her and began walking along with heavy steps.

"Well, I just happen to be off duty and have nothing to do today. I'll at least look after your wounds. Be thankful that I'm the one who found you, Blacky! Blacky for a black cat. Hahaha! You like it? Yeah you dooo. Yeah you, ow, I get it, seriously, stop biting, blood's coming out!"

Kuroka was carried away and left at her wit's end, in mental anguish over the man's devastatingly poor naming sense.

Why did this happen to me...?

She vaguely realized that she had a fairly misfortunate disposition. However, what happened this time around was a calamity far outside the realm of simple misfortune. Kuroka didn't know that incidents were happening all over the place at the same time. And the source of it all began that very morning.

Chapter I: Everyone Is Secretly Scheming Something, so the Butler Who Knows All Is Quietly Sighing

“My liege, do you plan to go to town again today?”

Morning. An elderly butler called out to Archdemon Zagan as he was in the middle of making preparations to head out in his throne room. It was Raphael. He wore a tailcoat without a single crease upon it and had a calm bearing about him. He exceeded fifty years in age now, yet his muscles were still firm, and he had a deep scar carved across his face. His left arm was covered in armor from the shoulder down, and no matter how one looked at him, he didn't look like he held a respectable occupation, but that left hand was also gripping a ladle of all things.

Zagan nodded back to his loyal retainer.

“Yeah. Having said that, I'm pretty much at the limit of what I can investigate on my own. I plan to have Kimaris come along this time,” Zagan replied from atop his throne.

Just as always, Zagan's countenance was one that could make a child cry on sight. He had black hair, which he'd lately put in the effort to comb into order. Nevertheless, his silver eyes still had a dangerous air about them. He wore a long mantle, and was the spitting image of a sorcerer.

Raphael folded his arms in thought.

“My liege's old friend... Marc, was it? You've spent quite some time searching and have yet to find any clues, so who exactly could he be?”

This dated back to the days where Zagan was a mere waif scrounging through garbage in the alleys. He was someone Zagan could even think of as an older brother at the time.

“All you need do is follow in a certain man's footsteps.”

He was told this one month ago already. That's what the vampire Alshiera told Zagan when he sought the truth behind Azazel... and yet, she also told him not to chase after it. This all happened near the island nation of Liucaon, far away from Kianoides.

Naturally, Zagan immediately began searching for Marc's whereabouts upon returning to Kianoides. This was in fact the city where Zagan, Marc and one other all met each other. And despite all

that, he hadn't found a single clue after searching for an entire month.

Is he even alive to begin with?

Zagan pulled the old pair of glasses from his pocket. Marc had worn these before. The frame was rusty and the hinges wouldn't move. The lens even had cracks in it. At the very least, it was easy to see that they hadn't been used for several years.

Seeing that Zagan had suddenly gone quiet, Raphael shook his head.

"Correction, I suppose what you are truly searching for, my liege, is the truth about Azazel."

It was a name Zagan had read in a journal he found in Nephy's hometown, the hidden elven village. Judging from how it was listed with the names of the twelve Sacred Swords, he conjectured that it was the name of a thirteenth sword.

If a thirteenth of such troublesome thing exists, then I want to be sure of its whereabouts.

Seeing that it was recorded in the hidden elven village, it was entirely possible that it would somehow involve Nephy too. He had only planned to look into it because of this to begin with. That was supposed to be the case.

And yet, once he started chasing after that name, he only got caught up in stranger and stranger incidents. He met Raphael's foster daughter, who disparaged and hated sorcerers. Zagan and his daughter were cursed. He met the annoying vampire Alshiera, who caused Foll to go berserk, and then for some reason found her again gravely injured. He found out about the secret of the strongest Archangel Michael, who was also the head of the Archdemons, Andrealphus. And finally, he was reunited with his old friend Stella, who he was also acquainted with during his days with Marc.

Every single one was a troublesome event, and none of them should have had a commonality between them.

But, they may in fact all be connected.

It may have even gone back to his discovery of the demons existing, or even to him meeting his daughter. According to Alshiera, all of that had commonality with the man known as Marc. And now that he actually chased after Marc, Zagan was unable to find any traces of anything whatsoever. It was surely too optimistic to think everything would get settled by sheer coincidence.

Zagan pinched his brow, and realized that Raphael was staring at him, waiting for his next words.

"I've at least come up with several hypotheses regarding Azazel."

"Hmm. Could you share those with me?"

He refrained from carrying his sword within the castle, though it was close enough at hand. However, Raphael was a former Archangel

who was charged with wielding one of the twelve Sacred Swords, so Zagan tried putting his thoughts in order.

“Where to begin...? Let’s see, you know Archangel Michael, right? He’s a former colleague of yours.”

“Of course. He was a man of questionable character, so I didn’t like talking to him, though.”

“A correct decision. His true identity is the head of the Archdemons, Andrealphus. If you were to poorly prod at him, you may very well have died.”

As expected, even Raphael was left wide eyed in shock at such a revelation. Zagan waited for his butler to collect himself once more before he continued.

“According to him, there’s apparently something called a seraph sealed within each Sacred Sword. It’s probably the same reasoning as the Sigils of the Archdemon sealing away the Demon Lord.”

“A seraph? I’ve been with the church for a long time, but I’ve never heard of such a race before.”

And as Raphael expressed his puzzlement, Zagan shrugged his shoulders.

“I bet you haven’t. Apparently the preceding Archdemon Marchosias had a bone to pick with them, and he obliterated them to the point where even their existence wasn’t left behind. From the looks of it, even the church has no records of the seraphs.”

“Hmm...? Seeing their relation to the Sacred Swords, seraphs would be an existence related to god, right? Would it not be perfectly natural for an Archdemon to have a quarrel with them?”

“Well, just because they’re related to god doesn’t mean they’re necessarily noble altruists. Just by the fact that they deem all sorcerers as an evil that must be eradicated, the justice or whatever it is the church preaches is all twisted anyway.”

“That is painfully true...” Raphael grimaced and shook his head.

“That’s not the important point here, though. The vampire I met in Liucaon used the name Azazel as if referring to a person. Considering those two facts, it’s possible to infer the meaning of the name, right?”

Raphael surely understood what Zagan was implying, and his expression grew grimmer.

“In other words, Azazel is the name of a seraph?”

“Probably. Thinking of it that way, the meaning of the journal in the elven village changes a bit. We thought that it meant they collaborated with the wielders of the Sacred Swords at first...”

“But it’s not the Sacred Swords... They abided by the seraphs...?”

“Yeah. They do say that the elves are an existence closer to the spirits and gods, after all,” Zagan replied with a nod.

The elven journal was likely quite old. The possibility that it escaped Marchosias' grasp because the elven village was in such a hidden environment was also quite high. Moreover, elven language was difficult to understand, and even a high elf like Nephy couldn't extract the full meaning of Celestian. That's why it was possible to misread what was written.

Raphael pinched his brows as if to search through his memories.

"My liege, do you recall that I've told you of how I've seen Orobas' dreams before?"

"Yeah. Are you still seeing them?"

Raphael once fought against a demon and suffered fatal wounds. At that time, the Wise Dragon Orobas was also on the verge of death in the same place, and Raphael drank his blood and was given a new lease on life. Perhaps because of that, he could apparently see Orobas' memories in his dream.

Raphael, though, shook his head.

"No, I haven't seen them since you returned from Liucaon, my liege. However, I feel that the name Azazel came up in those dreams too."

"Really?"

Zagan reflexively leaned forward on his throne.

"How did it come up? Was it as an enemy? Or maybe an ally or pawn?"

"I can't recall... was it... loss...? No, broken, I think. In any case, they spoke as if it no longer existed in this world. Also, let's see... It would have helped... would be the correct way to put it? In any case, I feel like it wasn't used to refer to something antagonizing them."

"So it was a cooperative relation? Or maybe it was one of the hands they had to play...?"

Even if Azazel were a seraph or a Sacred Sword, it was only natural that it would be unknown to the church if it was in the hands of an Archdemon.

However, would Marchosias, who obliterated the very existence of the seraphs, really keep a seraph known as Azazel at his side?

Even if it were a Sacred Sword, it wouldn't change the fact that there was a seraph inside. Zagan didn't believe that the hatred of an Archdemon would allow that.

And as Zagan racked his brains over all that, Raphael spoke in a somewhat remonstrating tone.

"That is simply how I heard it."

"No, how you feel about it is critical information here. If you experienced Orobas' memories, then his emotions at the time should surely have an effect on you as well."

In other words, Zagan believed in Raphael's feelings on the

matter.

Zagan folded his arms and leaned back in his throne.

"In other words, we still don't have enough information despite all the suppositions."

All his suppositions still hadn't left the phase of being just 'to some extent.' It was still too early for anything to be conclusive. Even the journal he found in the hidden elven village changed meaning completely upon finding new information. There was a need to assume that any hypothesis he had now could be completely flipped on its head.

Zagan's gaze then fell back to the glasses in his hand.

"Well, in the end, the only clue we have is chasing after this guy..."

And as he said that aloud, he suddenly remembered a certain fact.

"Is something the matter, my liege?"

"Not really, I just remembered something that I discussed with Gremory and Barbatos."

"Which is?"

"They both said that they thought Marc's face looked familiar."

Although both of them also said it might have just been their imagination too. However, it was impossible for both of them to say that by coincidence. At the very least, this was how it was for sorcerers. This fact also made Raphael grimace.

"Does that mean the man known as Marc has also come in contact with those two?"

"I don't know. Sorcerers live stupidly long lives after all. It isn't all that unlikely to bump into someone if you both live on the same continent for a hundred years."

"Is Barbatos not an inexperienced sorcerer still in his twenties much like you, my liege?"

His choice of words may have been somewhat impolite for one addressing his lord, but this butler was one who was devastatingly poor at choosing his words to begin with. To the contrary, the way he didn't choose to mince his words was also a sign of his trust and affection, so lately Zagan didn't pay it any mind at all.

"That's it," Zagan replied with a nod, "Barbatos didn't start picking fights with me because of Nephy's case or anything. I'm thinking that maybe Marc was loitering around me when I became a sorcerer, and Barbatos chanced upon him during that time."

Barbatos' teacher, Andras, was the first sorcerer Zagan killed. He didn't have any way of knowing it at the time, but the reason Barbatos kept popping up around him was to challenge him to a fight. Having said that, their 'fights' were far too short to approach the realm of killing each other, and after that repeated for a while, Barbatos

became Zagan's undesirable friend.

Raphael let out a short sigh.

"Then it would make sense to interrogate that damned Barbatos wouldn't it... Now that I think of it, I remember seeing some torture devices laying around in the storage room."

He was likely just linking the words interrogation and torture and that's what came to his mind. He wasn't actually implying to put them to use or anything. Zagan understood that much, but he shook his head anyway.

"Do you think his memory is actually that good? If he's not interested, it's suspicious if he even remembers what he had to eat for dinner the previous day."

"I'm surprised he can even call himself a sorcerer like that."

"Aah... well, he's an idiot, but he's still smart."

Zagan had lately become aware that he couldn't really criticize others about this and couldn't make too much fun of him. And just then, he suddenly remembered something.

"Hang on, even if Barbatos doesn't know, my other subordinates might. I guess I'll ask them before heading out."

Now that he thought of it, he had investigated all over Kianoides, but he'd never tried asking his own subordinates about it. Even if they weren't as powerful as Gremory and Kimaris, he had over thirty sorcerers at hand who were each over a hundred years old. It would be foolish not to rely on them here.

And with that, Zagan realized that Raphael's body had stiffened up entirely.

"Hm...? Raphael, what's wrong?"

"Mm... It's nothing, the timing for it is just poor."

"The timing...? Did something happen?"

"Nothing serious. But... depending on how things go, those damn sorcerers may be in danger of dying."

Raphael was once more speaking in a difficult to understand way, leaving Zagan racking his brain for the meaning behind it.

"Uhhh... So you just urged them to do their work faster, and if we urge them on any more they may not be able to take the stress anymore?"

"Mm! Precisely!"

Raphael clapped his hands together, confirming that Zagan was right on the mark.

...Honestly speaking, Zagan would have preferred it if this butler could say things in an easier to understand way, though.

Zagan held back his sigh, and took a single piece of paper from his pocket. It was the one with himself, Marc and their other childhood friend drawn upon it. Or rather than drawn, it was projected onto the

paper using the sorcery known as Memorandum by extracting one of Zagan's memories, so it was somewhat different from a painting.

"Then pass this along to those subordinates of mine for me. If you just mention that I want to know more about him, someone who has any information will surely come to tell me something."

The recompense Zagan granted to his subordinates for their service was in no way frugal. His subordinates also understood this full well, so he could expect them to take on individual action to investigate this themselves.

Raphael accepted the piece of paper with a sense of relief about him.

"Understood. Will losing this be a hindrance in your own investigations, my liege?"

"This picture was created with sorcery. I can make another in no time."

Even when he was investigating in town, this Memorandum was quite useful.

"Oops, now that I think of it, I'll need to pass this around to my subordinates in town too."

Zagan had about twenty sorcerers working for him at Archdemon Palace, and a few others who knew how to heal others stationed at the church to assist his sworn ally Chastille. Those sorcerers rarely came by Zagan's castle, so there was a need to communicate this to them by letter or telepathic communication or the like. In any case, Zagan was heading to town, so he figured it was just faster to hand it to them directly.

And after Zagan mumbled that, Raphael narrowed his eyes like a hunter spotting his prey.

"My liege. If you're going by the church, I have a request of you."

"Hmm. What is it?"

In a rare turn of events, Raphael averted his gaze as if he found it difficult to reply. And after knitting his brows, the loyal butler eventually resolved himself.

"I'd like you... to check on how Kuroka is doing..."

I was thinking something was off about him today... so this is the reason, huh?

They weren't related by blood, but Kuroka was still Raphael's daughter. She was working at the church to this day, but because of a certain incident, Raphael was made out to be dead, so he couldn't just publicly visit her there.

"...Seriously," Zagan said with a sigh, "You two really are awkward. I told Kuroka to come visit you too, but from the looks of it, she never came either, huh?"

It had already been a month since Zagan told her to do so.

“I can’t refute that.”

“Well fine. I keep you by my side knowing that full well. I have no complaints about your work.”

“I am honored.”

Zagan held his hand up to stop Raphael’s reverent bow, and rose to his feet.

“Now then, it’s about time I get going. I’ve got some extra business to take care of now, after all. I’ll be back later than usual.”

“As you will.”

Raphael started to leave the throne room with a cruel smile as if he was off to kill his prey. And seeing that expression that looked like he was scheming some sort of rebellion, Zagan cocked his head to the side.

Hm? He looked somewhat relieved.

For a person who had never met Raphael, it truly looked like he was going to draw his sword at any moment, but Zagan could tell this was how he looked when he was relieved. It may have been because Zagan was going to check on his daughter, but he still seemed to be in far too good a mood for that. Well, he was a man whose actions and expressions all brought about misunderstanding, so all of this may have just been Zagan’s imagination. In any case, he had much to do today.

“Oh yeah, is Nephy in the kitchen right now? I want to see her before I head out.”

Ever since the incident in Liucaon, he felt like the distance between them had gotten even closer. A large reason for that was likely because they were both able to boldly declare in public that they were lovers. And as Zagan cheerfully asked that, his butler replied with a troubled expression.

“Lady Nephy left the castle moments ago.”

“Huh?”

Zagan’s expression clouded over entirely like an abandoned puppy.

“I do not know where she went, but she said that she had business with Chastille and Nephteros. Well, there are things that are easier to discuss between women, right?”

“Th-That’s... certainly true...”

Zagan was prepared to grant any of Nephy’s desires, but that girl lacked any sense of self-assertion to begin with. She even kept quiet when it concerned her own livelihood, or she would just put it off entirely.

He didn’t know what they were, but there were definitely things that Zagan couldn’t consider precisely because he was a man. There was even a precedent for creating unpleasant memories, like when she

first came to this castle precisely because of that. Having Chastille and Nephthys at her side was everything he could wish for in such a case, but...

I wanted to talk to and touch Nephthys even if just a little...

It was no exaggeration to say all his energy in the morning lately came from this desire.

And so, the Archdemon left his castle with slumped shoulders.



“Raphael, are Zagan and Nephthys gone?”

Shortly after Zagan left the throne room, a voice called out to Raphael who was seeing his lord off. It was a young voice, that of Zagan and Nephthys’s daughter Foll.

As always, her green hair was braided and she had twisting horns poking out of her head. She had large amber eyes, and wore a native dress using white and scarlet as basic tones. She looked to be just around ten years old. However, her amber eyes were filled with a strong light of determination.

Raphael replied to her with the tone of an affectionate father.

“Worry not. Both of them have left. I have arranged it so that both of them will be returning late. They surely won’t be back until nighttime.”

“Thanks.”

Foll bobbed her head down, and muttered in a severe voice.

“I can’t allow the two of them to find out... no matter what.”

The young girl looked to be brooding over it seriously, so Raphael gently brushed her head with a smile on his face.

“Do not get overly agitated, Foll. I am here with you.”

Foll’s tiny shoulders jumped with a start.

“Sorry, Raphael. I got you caught up in it.”

“I’m telling you not to worry. My king is Zagan, but my damned life is dedicated to you. It is absurd for you to carry any worries at all.”

“...Mmm.”

Foll walked up to the throne and plopped herself down in it.

“Lilith and Selphy are working just as we expected. We have the tacit consent and cooperation of Kimry and the other sorcerers. As long as Gremory moves just as I expect, she will not betray us. All there is to worry about is Nephthys, but she’s not in the castle.”

In other words, this young girl had a grasp of all authority in this castle.

“I’ll definitely make Alshire Imera a success. Even if it doesn’t make Zagan and Nephthys happy.”

Seeing that young girl who was just as awkward as her parents, Raphael put on a helpless smile.

“Fear not. Those two will surely rejoice over the things you do as a sign of your damned growth.”

He was able to reply to her with firm conviction.

“That... would be nice...”

It was the first plan that Foll had thought of and put into motion herself. It was only reasonable for her to be anxious. However, Raphael chose to serve under Zagan precisely so he could support this girl. That’s why he once more petted the young lady’s head.

The one I’m more worried about here is Lady Nephy...

He honestly kept Foll’s secret and supported her, but Raphael was burdened with another secret as well.

It’ll be nice if Lady Nephy does not bump into my liege...

It wasn’t a coincidence that Nephy left the castle today. She had her own goals to accomplish. She conferred with Raphael about her secret half a month ago. It was strangely just around the time that Foll came to him for support. Her secret was so that she could leave the castle to accomplish ‘a certain something.’

That’s why even as Raphael answered Foll’s request, he pretended that Nephy was always in the castle. However, Nephy left the castle today earlier than usual. That’s why he was unable to hide it from Zagan. That was also precisely why he needed a reason to keep Zagan out of the castle longer. He had no other choice. However, Raphael hadn’t taken any measures to help Nephy.

Well, Gremory will surely handle that side of things.

It was something Foll mentioned in passing, but Gremory was cooperating with her. Her character was difficult to understand, but she was far and beyond all of Zagan’s subordinates when it came to this sort of work. She truly had a talent for scheming.

...Well, he didn’t really want to rely on her all that much since there was a high probability that she would also create extra unnecessary problems.

It all led him to want to let out a big sigh.

But... Alshire Imera, huh...?

It was originally something related to the church and had nothing to do with sorcerers. Nevertheless, that word was now giving birth to unprecedented chaos within Archdemon Zagan’s circle. It was far too ironic.

And so, Raphael instinctively looked to the heavens, knowing full well there was no way the day would end peacefully.



“Nephelia, you came here because it’d be bad if big bro found out, right? Go do that further inside.”

The tip of Nephy’s pointy ears quivered upon being called. Her white hair, which was proof that she was a high elf, flowed straight

down to her waist, and she had large azure eyes. Just as always, she was wearing her ultramarine one-piece dress and a pure white apron, along with her boots which had sorcery cast on them to relieve fatigue. She also wore a boorish looking collar around her neck even to this day.

And after her younger sister whispered to her in the middle of all the hustle and bustle, Nephy bobbed her head down in return.

“Thank you very much, Nephteros. Chastille, you as well.”

This shop had many customers during the day, and there were many people who knew Nephy’s face.

Master Zagan is sure to come to town again today in his search too...

Chastille shook her head as if it wasn’t all that big a deal.

“Don’t worry about it Nephy. I had a vacation practically pushed on me all of a sudden, so I had more time than I knew what to do with. Today’s Alshire Imera, after all, so my subordinates are strangely worked up to do everything they can for me.”

“...In your case, is it not because you overwork yourself too much, so they want you to take a break?” Nephteros replied in exasperation.

Nephy gazed at her sister and best friend and let out a laugh of her own.

“What? Nephelia.”

“Nothing. Those outfits suit you two very well.”

Nephteros and Chastille were both wearing showy red outfits. The collars and sleeves were decorated with white fur, and they had cute little green ribbons tied up at their chests. Men would wear trousers with this outfit, but the girls were wearing short skirts. Nephteros began squirming about as if paying attention to her dark thighs sticking out.

Nephteros’ dark skin and Chastille’s scarlet hair and eyes suited the outfits quite well, which made Nephy want to narrow her eyes and smile. She would be wearing the same outfit herself shortly, but would it really suit her just as well as it did these two?

The three of them were currently in a tavern in Kianoides. It was the place where Manuela brought Nephy during a certain incident where she was feeling down, and also where Zagan and Raphael first met. Nephy was working here during the day whenever she found the chance, but that was a secret.

Nephteros then combed her hand through her silver hair and let out a sigh.

“That doesn’t sound like anything but sarcasm. Why do I have to wear this...?”

“Huh...? Are you embarrassed even though it has less exposure than your usual clothes?” Chastille asked with a tilt of her head.

“That’s not the problem! Aren’t you embarrassed wearing

something like a clown would?!”

“What are you talking about? Is this not the traditional outfit for Alshire Imera passed down in the church? What need is there to be embarrassed?”

“...Even if you imitate big bro with your haughty speech, you don’t sound convincing at all, you know?”

Chastille didn’t have any of the majesty that Zagan did when he said such things, and it felt more like a child innocently getting excited about wearing new clothes. And with a strained smile on her face, Nephy stretched her hand out to Nephteros’ clothes.

“Nephteros, your ribbon is coming loose. You’ll be serving customers, so you must pay attention to your personal appearance.”

“I-It’s none of your business.”

As Nephy fixed her green ribbon for her, Nephteros puffed her cheeks and looked to the side. However, her ears were just slightly dyed red, and were quivering about in a somewhat happy manner.

Does this mean she’s happy I wonder?

Her cute reaction left Nephy charmed, and Nephteros looked around the area to try and avert the topic.

“More importantly Chastille, Barbatos hasn’t noticed yet, right?”

The man named Barbatos was the sorcerer who served as Chastille’s guard. He was Zagan’s undesirable friend, and Nephy had also met him on numerous occasions. If he were to know of this, it would definitely reach Zagan’s ears. But Chastille puffed her chest out in pride and nodded.

“We’re all covered there. Apparently Barbatos has some business to take care of, so he won’t be around all day.”

“...It’d be nice if that’s the case...”

Nephteros didn’t get along with Barbatos, and was plainly making an annoyed expression.

“Lord Barbatos isn’t all that bad a person. It’s rude to speak so poorly of him.”

Nephy figured that speaking ill of Barbatos too much in front of Chastille may cause her to take offense, so she admonished Nephteros as much as she could manage. However, Nephteros’ face just grew even more weary.

“He’s only like that in front of Chastille, you know? He’s so irritating when he’s with me or Kuroka that it just makes you want to kill him.”

“Ummm... Well, that may be true.”

Nephy couldn’t say anything back to that. However, Nephy brought her face close to Nephteros and whispered in her ears.

“That’s no good, Nephteros. You can’t say things that’ll make Chastille more conscious of Lord Barbatos.”

“Huh? Richard said the same thing to me too. I didn’t go all that far this time, but is that still no good?”

“...You can tell by looking.”

Nephy pointed Nephteros’ gaze over to Chastille, who may have been making an effort to stand steadfast, but was bright red right up to her ears and trembling. Looking closely, she even had tears in her eyes.

“Well, mm. I get it.”

Nephteros looked to be somewhat at a loss, and shook her head.

“Anyway, how long do you plan on just chatting here? Wouldn’t it be bad to get spotted out here?”

Nephteros took Nephy’s hand and pulled her further into the shop.

The reason Nephteros is able to hold my hand like this is also thanks to Chastille, isn’t it?

Thinking back on it, her first encounter with her sister was the worst. They faced each other as enemies and hurt each other. And to think a day would come where they could hold hands like this. They would likely never have believed it at the time. Nephy didn’t notice that her own ears were quivering about happily at that fact.

There was a locker room for employees near the kitchen. Nephy stripped out of her usual clothes. These clothes and her fatigue abating boots were her precious treasures, the first presents Zagan had ever given her. She stood them up carefully within her own locker.

She then took out a red outfit identical to the one Chastille and Nephteros were wearing and changed into it. As she stooped over to put on her skirt, her long hair looked like it would touch the floor, so Chastille suddenly got behind her and held her hair back. Before she knew it, her hair had grown longer than she thought it was.

I see. Foll’s hair has grown, so it’s natural for mine to have grown as well.

After buttoning up completely, Nephy turned to Chastille and nodded.

“Thank you very much, Chastille.”

“No worries. Anyway, your hair is so fine and beautiful Nephy. Do all elves have such beautiful hair?”

And the one to reply with a sigh was Nephteros.

“There’s no way they do, right? How hard do you think it is to keep it in such good condition every day? It’s even worse lately with the cold because of the static electricity.”

“Aah, that’s been bothering you too Nephteros? I also have to spend a good while brushing my hair in the morning.”

“It’s a little easier for me since I’ve been using sorcery to suppress the static, though. Should I teach you later?”

“Please, by all means!”

Nephy clasped her sister's hand and returned an emphatic nod. Static electricity was apparently a term only used by sorcerers, but it wasn't sorcery itself. It was a natural phenomenon which was also the reason why some small stones could gather small amounts of debris around them. It wasn't well known to the public, but the human body also discharged static electricity.

Apparently, it was easier to manifest when objects were rubbed together and when the temperature dropped. For people with hair like Nephy and Nephteros, it would cause their hair to rise up as if it had a will of its own and was greatly troubling to deal with. Seeing such a passionate exchange between them, Chastille shrank back, completely overawed.

"I-I just kind of comb it back and tie it up, so I don't really have any trouble with it...?"

"...That's why you get called an amazon, you know?"

"Why do you know that, Nephteros?!"

It was about a month ago now. Nephy and the others were having fun taking a vacation on an uninhabited island near Liucaon. At that time, Chastille and Barbatos had a talk with each other, but apparently the two of them thought nobody heard them.

After she writhed in agony for a while, Chastille fiddled her fingers together finding it difficult to say anything, and turned to look at Nephy and Nephteros.

"Ummm... Should I really pay more attention to my appearance?"

"Is it not better to? Even I would like to please Master Zagan even if just a little."

"...A complete maiden."

Chastille's eyes shot wide open as if she was suddenly struck with shock.

"A maiden? I don't do it to the same extent as Nephelia, but even I pay attention to my own appearance, you know? I'm at least aware that elves have a tendency to attract attention here."

"Ugh, now that I think of it, both of you do wear really cute underwear."

"...Please don't stare."

Both Nephy and Nephteros covered their faces. Even Nephy wanted to wear something that wouldn't embarrass her as a woman when she was with Zagan, but having it said right to her face was embarrassing in of itself.

"Does Zagan know? Um... that you're putting in all this effort I mean."

Being asked that, Nephy reflexively exchanges looks with Nephteros.

"There's no way he does, right? Big Bro isn't the type to go

snooping around a girl's bedroom on his own."

"Rather, it'd be embarrassing if he found out..."

Even Nephy's ears were drooping down. Chastille was left feeling like she was completely defeated and bit down on her lip.

"Ugh... Is this what they call feminine motivation? P-Please tell me, Nephy, Nephteros. What should I do? What is a girl supposed to pay attention to?"

"Huh? Ummm, I'm not all that familiar with it myself, but for example, I try all sorts of perfumed oils when taking a bath. Scent is something that people get used to, so I cannot just keep using the same one forever."

"Perfumed oil? Is smell that important?"

"I-It might just be me, but I feel like Master Zagan is pleased when I choose something that smells good? Besides, isn't it embarrassing if I simply stink of my own body odor?"

Incidentally, the one who suggested using perfumed oils was Nephy's other friend, Manuela. It was apparently easier to use perfume, but it was difficult to use moderately so she felt like Nephy wouldn't be able to put it to full use yet. After hearing Nephy's explanation, Nephteros nodded along as well.

"Now that I think of it, you always smell good, huh?"

"Would you like me to share some with you, Nephteros?"

"Yes... Could you teach me more about it next time?"

"Of course. You'll be teaching me sorcery about suppressing static electricity after all."

It may have been the first time that these two siblings hit it off so well. And as they smiled at each other, Chastille turned pale and began sniffing at her own clothes and arms.

"...What should I do? I feel like I stink of sweat."

"You do have your duty to attend to, so would it not be somewhat inevitable?"

"Grrr, but once I start worrying about it, I can't get it off my mind now..."

I don't think Lord Barbatos would mind such a thing, though...

Nephy somehow managed to swallow what she was about to say, and smiled back at Chastille.

"Then I will share some perfumed oils with you next time. I can't be helped if you worry about it now."

And having that pointed out to her, Chastille drooped her shoulders and gave up.

"Now that I think of it, your place is fully equipped for baths, huh...?"

It had already been close to half a year now. When Chastille's life was being targeted by the church, she was being taken care of at

Zagan's castle, though only for a few days. That was also a difficult time for Foll, so Chastille's screams were rather common there too. It was somewhat nostalgic, so Nephy ended up replying carelessly too.

"I mean there's no way I could be dirty when I sit on Master Zagan's lap or let him sleep on mine now could I?"

Nephteros opened her eyes wide like she couldn't believe Nephy's casual confession.

"So lovers really do that sort of thing...?"

"No, Nephy and Zagan were like that before properly being lovers..."

"Why do you know that, Chastille?!"

"Huh? I mean, you have a tendency to speak of your private life quite openly..."

Nephy fell to her knees and covered her face.

I didn't mean to!



However, perhaps because Chastille was worried about how awkward Zagan was, she used to have a tendency to ask about how he was doing quite a bit, so Nephly ended up telling her things exactly as they were.

“Anyway, perfumed oils in a bath, right? I’ll give it a try too.” Chastille jotted down a memo with a dead serious expression. “What else do you think I should be doing?”

“How about wearing some cute clothes? You’re always just wearing a uniform aren’t you?” Nephteros commented.

“Ugh... I just don’t have any other clothes. About the only other thing I have is a formal dress.”

Both Nephly and Nephteros were left completely perplexed by her answer.

“So, shall we all go look at clothes after we’re done work today? I’m certain Manuela will lend her assistance.”

“Is that alright? Don’t you have something to do Nephly?”

Nephly wasn’t working at this tavern because she had money problems. Such was the case, but she nodded anyway like it was only a matter of course.

“It’s fine. On the contrary, I’m the one being helped by the both of you here.”

“O-Okay! I’ll do my best!”

“Now that it’s decided, let’s get to work.”

With that, Nephly started to head toward the kitchen, when Chastille called her to a stop.

“Ah, wait a sec Nephly. Isn’t it troublesome to have your hair like that in the kitchen?”

“Is it?”

“Yeah. Just wait a bit. I’ll tie it up for you.”

Chastille walked up to Nephly’s back and skillfully tied up her hair.

Having a friend do this kind of thing for me... somehow makes me happy.

Fully self-aware that her face was loosening up with a smile, Nephly turned around to show her gratitude.

“Th-Thank you very much.”

“So even you can do something more or less womanly, huh?”

“The more or less is unnecessary Nephteros... It’s because long hair gets in the way during missions. I’m just used to tying it back up whenever it becomes undone.”

“I didn’t really mean to belittle you. It’s just, um...”

Chastille was glaring at her, but Nephteros’ lips were simply quivering as if she couldn’t really put what she meant in words. She

wanted to say something, but what exactly was it? As Nephy cocked her head to the side in curiosity, Chastille simply nodded, having come to a sudden understanding.

“Do you want me to tie yours up too Nephteros? We can’t have your hair getting in the way when you need to run about on the floor now can we?”

“...Well, if you insist, please do.”

The tips of Nephteros’ ears turned the slightest bit red as she turned her head to the side in a huff. The sight of her little sister doing so was ever so charming to Nephy.

I see. This is how Nephteros acts spoiled then.

Would Nephy also be able to act spoiled like that one day? It had been a month since she was informed that this girl was her real sister. She felt like the distance between them had shrunk a fair amount, but nevertheless, she felt like she couldn’t rival Chastille here. Even so, it was quite a pleasant experience to have her best friend do up their hair like a matching pair.

All that’s left is to find ‘that’ without any problems coming up.

Nephy had been going behind Zagan’s back doing these things for quite a while, and she knew she didn’t have much time left. Yet she had yet to find what she was searching for.

And so, Nephy prayed that the day would end peacefully.

Chapter II: Those who Get Lost Always Seem to End Up in an Alley

“Why?! Why are you doing this boss?!”

The one wailing in a voice like he was vomiting out blood was a young sorcerer. Flames wrapped his entire surroundings, the suffocated smell of blood and a mist of blood itself lingered all over. It was the scene of a massacre. There was a small village here. They possessed no power, lived in peace, and yet, it was also the home of a special group of therianthropes. And now, it was the sight of an atrocity, covered in corpses.

The man screamed, bewildered by the hellish scene of fire and the dead.

“Didn’t you say so yourself!? You’ll create a happy world! One where nobody dies unreasonably! That’s why I followed you!”

But there was no reply to his screams. The man was surely the foolish one here. Sorcerers were the very pinnacle of villains who couldn’t live proper lives to begin with. The ones who believed the honeyed words of such villains were the crazy ones.

But even so, I wanted to believe it.

The man himself was no exception, he lived his life crawling along the ground as a sorcerer. He stole from others like it was perfectly natural. He would even beat people to the point where they lost consciousness for just a single slice of bread. And of course, he had the same done to him. He was the trash of society, and his boss taught him the sorcery to ‘save people.’

Even as human trash, he was shown a dream that maybe he could start his life over again. And the result of all that was the hell before his eyes. The boss he believed in gave him no answer, and before he knew it, his screams changed from verbal abuse to pleading.

“Someone! Is someone there!? Anyone!? Someone answer me!”

The one to give birth to this hell was none other than this man himself. Even he knew that his screaming was completely to his own convenience.

Even so, even just one is fine. Someone answer me!

If someone were alive, even he didn’t know what he wanted to do, what he wanted them to say to him, or what he wanted from them...

“Uuh... ah...”

He sauntered around like a corpse himself when he suddenly

heard a groan. He looked around in a panic, and found a single woman leaning against a crumbled wall.

“Hey! Are you ali...”

After running over, the man strained his face.

It's no good. She... can't be saved...

There was a dark red puddle at the woman's feet. Looking closely, her shoulder was torn off with the wound going all the way to her chest. He could tell that it went all the way to her heart. It was far too unmanageable a wound for this man's pitiful sorcery. Nevertheless, the woman was still breathing.

“Please... save... this child...”

The woman was embracing a small girl in her arm. The girl was wrapped in a wet blanket to protect her from the flames. She had lost consciousness, but she was clearly still alive.

“I got it. It's alright, you don't need to...” he trailed off. By the time he ran over to her, the woman stopped breathing altogether, making him utter “...Fuck.”

Just why did he learn sorcery, anyway? He looked down at the unconscious girl.

Just this one. No matter what... I need to save just this one... If I don't...

That may have been the one and only form of atonement permitted to this man. And just as the man was about to take the girl in his arms...

“Hey, you. Explain what exactly happened here.”

A voice called to him from behind. It was a cool-headed voice that also contained a burning rage to it. Just from hearing it, the man felt like his heart had been suddenly grasped. He trembled violently, but turned around nonetheless. And the one standing there was...

The man suddenly woke up. There was no fire, no blood, all he could see was the wooden ceiling above him. When people on the floor above him walked about, pieces of debris would fall down. He turned his head to the side, and on the dirty table next to him he saw an ashtray with a mountain of cigarette butts along with two fallen liquor bottles. Though it was temporary, this was his home here in this town, and the cheap sofa he was sleeping in was his bed.

“...Shit. That dream again...”

Five years had passed since that hellish day. And even five years later, this man lived in misery.

I drank a little too much yesterday...

Today was one of his few days off work. And apparently his choice of letting loose was some heavy drinking. The man pushed himself up, and was suddenly assaulted by a severe headache and nausea, finally making him aware of his hangover. He endured the

pain, used sorcery to stimulate his liver and waited for all the alcohol to leave his system. And now finally able to get up somehow, he spotted shining green letters on his table.

“...Seriously?”

It was a magical message sent by sorcery, and it informed the man that his day off was an empty dream. He didn't feel like his headache or nausea would go away any time soon, but the man took his robe with unsteady movements and vanished into the blindingly bright townscape.



“You hear me brats? Your opponents are fundamentally bigger than you. That's why you should consider it over the moment you're caught. Your opponent will think the same.”

About half an hour had passed since Zagan left the castle. He was now in the alley where Kuroka Adelhide would later collapse, passing on the truth indifferently without an ounce of compassion in his voice. And crowded around him were dirty looking children. They were all waifs, the homeless children of Kianoides.

He was in an alley of Kianoides' shopping district. There was trash scattered here and there with a pungent smell lingering in the air, but this was their gathering spot. It also happened to be Zagan's old haunt.

Zagan was squatting down to bring his gaze down to theirs, and the waifs nodded along, completely absorbed in what he was saying. One of them then raised their hand.

“Hey Archdemon. What do we do then?”

“Be a man and die... is what I'd like to say, but I didn't come here to talk to such standup guys. There's tons of ways of greedily pawing for life.”

The waifs all raised their voices in admiration and leaned in.

“You're gonna teach us sorcery?!”

“Don't be conceited. How am I supposed to teach you lot sorcery when you can't even read?”

“Awww...”

One could not even begin learning sorcery until they were at least capable of reading a grimoire. Setting aside the dejected waifs, Zagan then grabbed the arm of one of the nearby girls.

“What would you do if you were caught like this?”

“Cry.”

“...There's not all that many people who would let go just from you crying. I'm asking how you would protect yourself.”

“Kick 'em!” “Bite 'em!” “Kick the dirt up!” “Spit!” “Throw a stone!”

The children yelled out everything that came to mind, to which

Zagan shook his head in astonishment.

“All of those are just stopgaps. None will lead to protecting yourself,” he said as he turned to the girl he was still holding and continued, “You, try twisting your arm toward yourself and pulling back. You don’t need to put strength in it. Give it a try as if you’re trying to point your thumb down.”

“Huh...? Like this? Ah! I got out!”

Her arm smoothly slipped through Zagan’s grip. A bunch of the children looked on in surprise, but one among them was skeptical.

“No way. He just let go, right?”

“If you think so, then try grabbing her yourself.”

“I’m definitely not gonna let go... Uwah! You got out! Why? Is this sorcery?”

Watching all the children get excited, Zagan shook his head.

“Like I’d teach something so dangerous to a bunch of brats. This is called arts. It’s something anyone can do once they get the hang of it.” Having said that, Zagan then made the children grab their arms again. “However, this just lets you escape, it doesn’t protect you. Here, you grab their arm in return and counterattack. Just like how you shook them off, now you grab their arm... Yeah, like that. Grab them at the wrist, though. Like that...”

Zagan corrected the position of the child’s hand, making it grip the other child’s wrist like it was a hand cover.

“Remember this well. While you’re grabbing them, try circling around to their side while stepping in toward your opponent... You fool. Why are you trying to roll? I’m telling you to circle around.”

As the child span on the spot like a ballerina, the other child softly fell to the ground.

“Huh...? What?!”

“Okay, not bad, huh? That’s good.”

Zagan honestly praised the child, who shyly smiled back at him.

“Can we finish off adults with this too?”

“Let’s see... You can at least get one up on them.”

And hearing that, the children all looked plainly disappointed.

“Awwww! It’s not enough to finish ‘em?” “Then it’s pointless.”

“They’ll just punch us right away. I wanna finish ‘em off.” “Yeah! I wanna kill ‘em!”

Seeing the children start to say some pretty dangerous things, Zagan lightly flicked one of them on the head.

“You fools. Do you plan on killing someone for a single slice of bread every single time? If you keep doing something like that, you’ll get killed by those damned adults immediately and that’ll be it. Don’t forget. They’re far stronger than you. If you’re gonna go that far, then at least get strong enough to protect yourself and those around you

before you do it.”

“So it’s fine to do it...”

The children were somewhat taken aback by this.

“That’s why you can’t use the art I taught you.”

“Whaaa? So what point is there in learning it?!”

Zagan flicked the forehead of the child who cut in right away before continuing.

“You’re all powerless brats. That’s a disadvantage, but also an advantage. Precisely because you’re powerless brats, your crimes will be resolved just by being beat a little. Make full use of the fact that you’re brats while you can.”

Zagan paused for a moment, then looked all the children in the eyes before continuing.

“However, using arts would be throwing away the fact that you’re brats. Even if you look like one, the adults would kill you if you walked around with a blade, right? It’s the same thing.”

“...So, why teach us this?”

It was an obvious question, to which Zagan nodded with a sincere look.

“It’s so that you have a choice other than quietly dying when you or one of your friends is in great danger.”

As long as they lived here in this place, it was a moment that was sure to come.

Epecially if they get involved with sorcerers.

That was precisely why, despite this being his old haunt where he met Marc, Zagan had never tried even coming close to here before. Coming here was his very last resort when he really had no more clues at all, and that was his exact predicament.

Zagan once more took a look at the waifs before him.

“When that time comes, use these arts without hesitation. Throw away the fact that you’re brats. If you do, you can at least buy time for you and the others to run away. This is power for that purpose.”

He wasn’t sure if what he was saying got through of them. There were those looking at him rebelliously, and those who seemed bewildered, but all the children were quiet and listening to him attentively.

He then noticed that there was a single girl looking on from outside the pack of children. Zagan shifted his gaze over to her. The waifs were from all manner of races, but this girl appeared to be a human. She had faint blonde hair and deep blue eyes. If she were to wear some nice clothes, she may have looked like a proper young lady, but unfortunately, she was covered in dirt and couldn’t really be distinguished from the boys.

“What’s wrong? You look like you have something to say.”

“...Why is a sorcerer being kind? Someone told us... any adult trying to be kind to us is lying.”

She bluntly laid out her hostility, though she did so fearfully and timidly. And with that cautious tone pointed at him, Zagan nodded in admiration.

“That’s right. You should thank the one who bestowed you with that knowledge. Naturally, I’m not going to teach you this for free.”

A look of fear spread across the children’s faces.

Well, it’s good for them to fear sorcerers.

If one tried to live in the alleys and threw away their sense of wariness, only death awaited them. Zagan pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and cut to the chase.

“Have you lot seen the guy in this picture? The one with glasses in the middle. This is him ten years ago, so he should be an adult now...”

It was the picture of three dirty children, a reproduction of what he had handed over to Raphael in the morning. There were only three people in the world who could currently use this sorcery including Zagan. The children leaned forward in curiosity, having forgotten their fear from moments ago, and inspected the mysteriously detailed Memorandum. However, none present recognized the boy in glasses.

“Dunno.” “Never seen him.” “Oh I know, these are glasses.” “This is my first time seeing glasses.” “Can I sell this picture?”

The children were saying whatever came to mind, to which Zagan questioned them further in a reassuring tone.

“So how about a suspicious guy who was kind to you lot like I was?”

“Never.” “Mm. Archdemon’s the first.”

Zagan was hoping that Marc had taught them arts like he did for Zagan back in the day, but that didn’t appear to be the case either.

“I see... Whatever. I’ll come teach you arts again, so let me know if you see this guy or remember anything about him.”

Ten years had already passed since this picture was taken. The probability that these children knew anything about him was fairly low. Zagan knew this, but this was his last clue. It all led him to just want to sigh. He wasn’t able to hide the disappointment in his voice, and noticing this, the small girl from outside the pack tilted her head to the side. She then pointed at the Memorandum.

“Hey, is the one drawn over here a small Archdemon?”

Next to Marc in the picture was a younger Zagan making an unpleasant face.

“Yeah. That’s me. Back when I was eight.”

“You’re smaller than me.” “The Archdemon was a brat too!”

The girl then curiously cocked her head to the other side.

“Why did you become a sorcerer?”

It was a natural question to have, but Zagan pointed to the Memorandum himself with in a tiresome manner.

“I was about to be killed by a sorcerer right after this, and I became one after killing him instead.”

All the children fell silent at his answer. In other words, Zagan was one of those who had put away being a brat because he was about to be killed by an adult. It was something the children here might also face one day.

As Zagan rose to his feet, the girl timidly called out to him.

“Hey, next time, could you teach me those arts too... please?”

“...Next time.”

Zagan bopped the girl on the head, when suddenly one of the other children raised their voice, having suddenly remembered something.

“Oh!”

“Did you remember something about this guy?”

Zagan bent down at the waste and questioned the child, but the child shook his head.

“Nuh-uh. Not that. Is the reason you taught us about arts today ‘cause it’s Alshire Imera?”

Zagan knit his brows at the unfamiliar word.

“What’s that Alshire thing...?”

It vaguely resembled the name of a certain vampire, making it sound like a bad omen. And all the children exchanged looks with each other, including the girl from outside the pack.

“Hey Archdemon, you don’t know about Alshire Imera?”

“It’s my first time hearing of it. It sounds like something related to the church. What is it?”

Zagan curiously questioned the children, who suddenly looked sad... or rather, looked like they pitied him. And then, with no warning, they hugged Zagan.

“Wh-What’s with you lot?”

“Poor Archdemon.” “Come back whenever you want.” “I think of you as a friend, Archdemon!” “You’re not alone Archdemon!”

“G-Gah! Let me go! I’m busy!”

And with such incomprehensible sympathy poured down on him, Zagan escaped the alley in a panic.



“...Seriously, what’s going on today?”

Zagan felt like strange things were happening all day. Such was the case with the waifs suddenly showing him incomprehensible sympathy, but there was also the matter of Nephy leaving the castle without saying a single thing to him, and how Raphael was acting somewhat strange. Thinking about it carefully, he felt like Foll was

acting somewhat fidgety and restless as well.

Something was happening, and only he knew nothing about it. That's what it felt like. He was somewhat concerned over this, but Zagan shook his head.

There's just too many unresolved issues going on at once, my mind may just be muddled from all that.

The biggest problem was his one-month investigation of Marc showing absolutely no progress at all. Alshiera left him with Marc's glasses as a clue. The sorcery to trace the owner's mana when they had been wearing them for a long period of time wasn't all that complicated. It should have been simple to follow the lead, but the mana trail didn't lead anywhere.

He didn't just disappear under natural circumstances. Something out there erased all the trail so thoroughly that it led to nothing. It was as if he was the target of an Archdemon's retribution, like he didn't exist from the very beginning.

That's entirely possible, but both me and Stella learned how to survive from him.

So just what did it mean? Zagan came out of the alley while deep in thought, and found a familiar face waiting for him.

"Judging from your face, it looks like you couldn't find anything either, Sir Zagan."

It was a sorcerer with the face of a lion. He had a black mane and golden eyes. He was tall enough that even Zagan had to look up at him, and one could see from his muscles that he possessed enough strength to pulverize stone with his fists without even having to rely on sorcery. And yet, he belonged to a race of therianthropes that could be put right next to the elves and cait siths when it came to the scarcity of their populations.

He was one of Zagan's trusted subordinates, his right hand man, Kimaris. This was the man Zagan turned to when he reached his limit investigating this matter on his own. However, contrary to his ferocious appearance, Kimaris' expression was quite unsteady.

"My apologies. I was unable to trace the scent from these glasses back to its owner."

Kimaris held out Marc's glasses. As far as Zagan knew, there was nobody in the world who could trace a scent better than Kimaris could. The cait sith Kuroka's sense of smell was amplified by her loss of sight, but nevertheless, she would surely not be able to compare to this sorcerer.

"You too, huh...? Sorry for making you tag along on this chore."

"Think nothing of it, I am fully aware that if you say that this is necessary for you Sir Zagan, then it is surely something that is necessary for us as well."

“Hmph, you won’t get anything for flattering me.”

Kimaris shifted his attention over to the alley Zagan came out of.

“But is it alright not to teach those children how to speak to others? If it were anyone but you, it would have been quite serious.”

They didn’t show a single hint of respect even when talking to an Archdemon. Zagan could understand what Kimaris was saying, but all he could do was shrug his shoulders anyway.

“Isn’t it laughable for a sorcerer to preach about etiquette? Besides, that lot are cleverly surviving by accumulating trash. They’ll at least be able to acquire wisdom all on their own.”

Zagan’s response was astonishing, but Kimaris actually found this quite pleasant and nodded.

“I really do think it was good fortune they were talking to you, Sir Zagan.”

“Those with good fortune wouldn’t be homeless on the streets to begin with.”

Having said that, it wasn’t all that troublesome for Zagan to have someone around him who would say that.

In any case, neither of them were able to find any clues on Marc, and Kimaris nodded with a heavy expression.

“Let’s get back on track. We were both unable to find a single trace by following the trail of mana and using your nose. The only conclusion I can think of is someone on the level of an Archdemon erasing all traces that would lead to him.”

“I have the same thought. In other words, it’s been set up so that man didn’t even exist in the first place.”

That also meant there was an extremely low probability that Marc was still alive, and it would be endlessly difficult to even search for what it was that he encountered.

“...Stella may have a clue regarding Marc, but...”

It wasn’t likely that he would ever meet her again. And remembering the face of his old friend, Zagan let out a sigh without even realizing it.

“Sir Zagan, is that the name of the one who was your good friend...?”

“Yeah. She’s being sheltered by Andrealphus right now. It’s better for the both of us if we don’t meet again.”

Zagan was the one who killed her family, and it was entirely possible that if she were able to recover, then she could live a life as a normal citizen without any relationship to sorcery or the like.

“Let’s continue our search steadily. There is no mistaking that you met him here ten years ago, Sir Zagan. I’m sure there is some clue lying about,” Kimaris said in an encouraging tone.

“...My goodness. I’m making others take me into consideration

here, huh? Well, you're right. Let's patiently keep searching."

It wasn't like Zagan had given up, but his smile was so empty that it was clearly bravado. He then suddenly recalled something about the children's behavior earlier.

"Oh yeah, Kimaris. Do you know what that thing called Alshire something or other is?"

Zagan ran away from the children's incomprehensible reaction earlier, but he was still wondering what exactly was going on. If it was something that came up while pursuing Marc, then he felt like he should at least understand what it was.

Kimaris' shoulders trembled with a jolt.

"I don't know if it's the same thing as what I'm thinking of, but I do know of something with a similar name."

"...So what is it?"

Zagan questioned the lion in a sharp tone, to which Kimaris shook his head.

"If you're talking about Alshire Imera, then it's a ceremony extolling a saint of the church... I think."

"A ceremony to extol a saint? Is that happening today?"

"Who knows? I've never heard what precise date it's on, but it just might be so."

Kimaris looked to be calm as he replied, but Zagan didn't overlook the fact that his gaze was wandering ever so slightly.

"Hmmm... You're hiding something... or rather, there's something that's hard for you to say?" Zagan said, folding his arms.

"...Sir Zagan, are you able to read minds?"

"I'm asking you because I can't... but, whatever. If you won't answer me, that must mean there's a suitable reason for it."

"My apologies. But, what I've told you so far is the truth."

Zagan nodded in understanding.

If Alshire is some kind of name, then perhaps the full phrase would mean Alshire's Day?

The god of the church had no name. If the name signified anyone, it would be the saint. However, those known as saints were rather suspicious. To begin with, they had to be people who performed some sort of miracle after they died. Apparently it wasn't enough to be a hero who accomplished something amazing in exchange for their life. And even when they used the word miracle here, it covered a very wide range.

They were things like a deceased Archangel becoming his Sacred Sword and fighting on as the sword itself. Or a woman who possessed the power to heal enshrining her arm into a statue so that all who touched her statue even after her death were healed by her. Or one who left behind a sacred spring which could expel the undead. There

were even more mundane cases like one who sowed seeds in a desert, or the girl who created a forest that would only sprout several hundreds of years later.

Speaking honestly, Zagan suspected that several of them were in fact sorcerers. The most famous of miracles, though, was one who resurrected after death. It was quite hypocritical of the church to extol that when they condemned the undead as an evil existence, but it wasn't an incomplete existence like zombies or skeletons or even vampires who required blood. Apparently it was a full on resurrection as a human.

I mean, just the fact that they died and came back makes them inhuman.

That's why Zagan laughed scornfully at the existence of saints before, but lately his thoughts on the matter changed just a little.

It's possible that stories of the seraphs were transposed over the stories of saints.

It shouldn't have been all that simple for even Marchosias to completely erase the history of something that existed before. There was a possibility that clues to their existence could have slipped by him and stayed within the church. Having said that, they were still an existence that Marchosias thoroughly wiped from the world. It shouldn't have been something so easily available in the open that even the waifs in the alleys knew about it.

Zagan then shook his head to change his train of thought.

"Well, it's probably faster to get information about church matters by asking people from the church."

Chastille... apparently had business with Nephy, but Zagan could also resort to Kuroka or Richard, or even his sister-in-law Nephteros who was freeloading there. After he muttered that, though, Kimaris looked clearly flustered.

"S-Sir Zagan! If possible, could you just pretend that you never heard about Alshire Imera?"

"Huh? Is it something troublesome for me to know about? Isn't it a church ceremony?"

"That's... if you wish it to be, then I will definitely answer you. But, just today... just for one day, I would like you to avert your eyes from it."

Zagan had not known Kimaris for all that long, but this was the first time he had seen the lion get so desperate and plead for something.

If this guy is going so far...

If it was something that posed a danger to Zagan or anyone around him, then this man would definitely not act in this way. And since it couldn't be helped, Zagan simply nodded.

"I got it, I got it. I won't prod any further. Is that fine?"

"...Thank you very much."

Kimaris bowed down deeply, and Zagan put his hand to the lion's shoulder and shook his head.

"Stop that. I was being insensitive. There are things that people don't want others to ask them about."

To Zagan, those things may have been matters related to Marc and Stella. Kimaris finally showed a relieved expression.

"Mm! Mm! Nice Alshiere Imera! I can feel a sharp love power all over today! You! Girl! I'll give you an apple! Today is a good day!"

An old woman's voice rang in the air, and Kimaris' expression turned so grim that it felt like all the hard work he had just put in was trampled underfoot.

"Aah... Mm. That's enough for today, Kimaris. You're busy, right?"

"Excuse me! I must go seize Miss Gremory!"

Kimaris vanished like the wind, living up to his name of the Black Blade.

I've got a bad feeling about this...

Zagan promised he wouldn't prod any further, but he felt like something troublesome was going to happen. And with his right hand man fully occupied with that old woman, Zagan was unable to realize that a single shadow slipped into the alleyway where he was talking to the children.



"The Archdemon was a good guy, huh?" "I kinda feel sorry for him, though." "Mmm. Let's share our food with him next time." "Dummy. The Archdemon's a big important guy, right? He at least has food, you know?" "It would've been good to include him in Alshiere Imera, though." "Mmm..."

The children in the alleyway were chatting in good spirits. And just a little further away from them, one girl, Lisette, was simply watching them. This was the girl who first showed wariness toward Zagan. Lisette brushed back her dirtied blonde hair, and buried her face in her knees.

Was the Archdemon kind because he used to be one of us?

He was an adult, but he didn't beat any of them. He also went out of his way to teach them what he called arts just in exchange for a few questions. It may even have been the case that the questions he had was a simple excuse, and his original intent was to teach the children a means of defending themselves. At the very least, that's what the children who came in contact with him were thinking. Even Lisette had a feeling welling up inside her that she wanted to believe him.

But, I don't know if I can.

The only ones who gave her a place to belong were these children

here, but Lisette was still a newcomer and had yet to close the sense of distance between them.

I wonder what that would person say here...?

She didn't know their name, and couldn't even remember their face. But nevertheless, that person was Lisette's one and only emotional pillar of support. And as she sat on her own with her head hung low, one of the children beckoned her over.

"Lisette, come on over. It's warmer if we're all packed together, you know?"

The laughing children had their shoulders pressed up against each other, and it certainly did look warm.

"...Mmm!"

And just as she joined the group...

"Hmm, Hm, Hmm♪ I'm a pirate, a selfish pirate♪ Today I'll kill and steal in the west♪ Tomorrow I'll be robbed and killed in the east♪ I'm in a grave of theft and murder♪ Who will I steal from today♪ Who will steal from me tomorrow♪"

A disturbing song suddenly rang out in the alleyway. It came from the path Zagan left on, and a single shadowy figure was drawing nearer to them. The shadowy figure wore a hooded robe, and took light steps like that of a fox on the hunt while humming a disturbing song. They had a necklace covered in gems hanging from their neck. It was beyond easy to see that this was a sorcerer.

Their out of tune singing was jarring, making the eeriness of this sorcerer remarkably conspicuous. It was impossible to sense the kindness they received from the Archdemon Zagan they were just talking to earlier from that song.

"That guy looks dangerous!"

"Run!"

The children scattered off in every direction. However, for some reason, Lisette felt like she recognized that face under the hood, and was unable to run. Before long, the hooded figure came a stop right in the middle of the alley, and took a big sniff of the pungent air as if it were pleasant.

"Mmmm, this rotten air is so nostalgic."

Lisette could see a warped smile under their hood.

"And he's... not here, huh? Well, it's been a few years since then, so it can't be helped. I wanted to have another match with him again too... Too bad... Too bad..."

The sorcerer didn't seem disappointed at all, and their mutters conversely sounded to be in high spirits. The sorcerer then suddenly spun around on the spot.

"By the by... you got some business with me?"

"Eek..."

Lisette was definitely reflected in the sorcerer's eyes.

"Hmmm? You have a hearing problem? That's not a good attitude to have, didn't anyone teach you that? Hey, did you curse your own misfortune at never having been taught that?"

"Y-You're wrong... I..."

Lisette's knees trembled with a clatter, and she fell back on her butt. This was surely what the phrase 'going weak in the knees' meant. She knew she had to run away, but she couldn't put any strength in her legs. The sorcerer with the twisted smile then kicked off the ground toward Lisette.

"Eek!"

Lisette covered her head and closed her eyes. She was surely going to die here. And contrary to that fear in her heart, something warm wrapped around Lisette's body. She couldn't realize at the moment that the sorcerer was hugging her. At the same time, the sound of something being smashed rang in the air and something was dripping down on her from above.

"Hey, I'm talking to you here. What're you trying to do to my little sister?"

Lisette timidly turned her head, and saw a grotesque looking 'something' behind her. They were also wearing a robe just like the sorcerer, but they had four arms covered in fur sticking out of it. She couldn't see their face because the sorcerer's fist was planted right there, but at the very least, she'd never seen this race before.

"A brahma...? Why the hell are you here?" The sorcerer muttered in an unexpected tone.

"OOOooooOOOH!"

Even with their face gouged by the sorcerer's fist, those four arms charged in toward them... no, toward Lisette.

"Good grief... don't bite your tongue, okay?"

With that, the sorcerer grabbed Lisette in one arm and jumped back. The four arms chased after them just a step behind, and taking a look at them now, she could see they were longer than the sorcerer by two heads or so. If Lisette were to stand up next to them, they would truly be two times her height. The sorcerer's previous punch seemed completely ineffective, and the four arms came down toward them in a barrage.

"What poor taste. You're gonna make girls hate you like that, you know?"

The sorcerer muttered along with a sigh, and put Lisette down on the ground. The sorcerer then unleashed a kick that drew an arc in the air. And the moment it felt like that leg was going to come into contact with one of those arms...

"Guh?"

The four armed body span in the air with a thud.

Is this the same arts the Archdemon was teaching us...?

It wasn't just in the realm of grabbing someone and throwing them down, but a full on kick. Even as an ignorant child, she could tell that the level of ability and technique was on an entirely different dimension.

She didn't even understand what actually happened, but the four armed beast went head first into the ground. And the sorcerer's art didn't end there. They spun around like a top on one leg and brought down their other foot on its head. A dull shockwave spread through the air from that axe-like strike. However, the strike only managed to connect with the ground.

"...Hmm?"

The sorcerer's jeering tone vanished. The four armed beast planted its hands to the ground and used them to propel itself back. It was now postured with all its hands on the ground, and the two of them were now just glaring at each other. However, they didn't clash.

"Grrrr."

Before the sorcerer could even take action, the four armed beast leaped back a great distance and vanished.

"...Looks like it ran away."

The sorcerer then finally turned to look at Lisette.

"You alright? Can you stand?"

Lisette only just noticed that she had fallen back to the ground. She grabbed the hand the sorcerer held out to her and was somehow able to get back to her feet.

"U-Um... Did you... save me?"

"I meant to?"

"Why...? I can't... give you anything... back."

Adults didn't show kindness without expecting anything in return. Those who did were all liars.

Protect yourself.

That was the one and only truth within Lisette's heart. After she timidly wringed out her question, the sorcerer let out a laugh and rubbed her head.

"I'm from this area too. In a sense, you're a little sister of mine. Do siblings of the streets need any reason to save each other?"

This was a sort of motto of the city waifs. The children who lived in the streets and didn't trust the adults called each other siblings of the street.

The sorcerer then removed their hood.

"Good grief. I came here to get a look at Zagan's face, but I can't just ignore a sibling in crisis now can I?"

And upon seeing their face, Lisette gulped down.

This person... is the one drawn in the Archdemon's picture...

Her clothes and the color of her eye was different, but her profile was certainly similar. Her features were exactly what one would imagine if ten years had passed. But one of her eyes was the same color as Zagan's, silver.

And so, the silver-eyed sorcerer muttered.

"Anyway, that's the first time I've seen a brahma. I heard they went extinct a long time ago, though."

One who had perished was wandering around the present times. It was something that was originally impossible, but on this day... on Alshire Imera, it could be said to be inevitable.



"Hey Kuroka, you gonna be okay running your errands alone? Should Kuu come along? Kuu's gotta go to work today anyway, so Kuu can come along partway, you know?"

Kuroka's roommate Kuu called out to her in a worried voice as the two of them sat in their room in the church.

"I'm just going out to read scriptures at the orphanage and the public office. You have preparations for Alshire Imera on top of your job, right, Kuu?"

"That's... true."

Kuu puffed out her cheeks in dissatisfaction and flopped back on her bed.

"You're working too much even though it's Alshire Imera, Kuroka. Why are Miss Nephteros and Miss Chastille taking a break today of all days?"

Chastille and Nephteros both weren't at the church today.

"Lady Chastille works too much, so the Three Knights forced her to take a break. Miss Nephteros doesn't work for the church to begin with."

"Huh? She doesn't? I thought she was some big wig like a priest or a bishop or something."

Kuu sat back up with a surprised expression, and Kuroka replied with a smile.

"The reason she lends her assistance to the church is completely out of her own kindness. That's why you shouldn't be unreasonable with her. Isn't it normal to want to spend time with your family at least on this day?"

"Family... What kind of people are Miss Nephteros' family?"

"I don't know all that much myself, but she apparently has a bigger sister. Nephteros went out to meet her today."

"Hmmm... a big sister, huh? Is she amazing?"

Kuroka put her hand to her chest and nodded.



“She’s wonderful.”

“Kuroka, did you meet her?”

“Yes. Back when I went to Liucaon, just for a moment...”

She’s the one Mister loves.

She was surprised when she found this out, but at the same time, she was fully convinced of it. Kuroka held out her hand in front of her. A world without light was a little different from a completely pitch black world. Rather than being akin to a moonless night, it was more like a fog where one couldn’t even see their hands. It wasn’t black or white, simply a world without color.

Even in such a world, Kuroka was able to make memories. She was able to imagine the contours of what she touched. She could get a firm understanding of what was at her feet by striking her cane against the ground. That’s how she was able to create a view of the outside world within her.

She thought that she was quite used to it by now, but the sensation of being able to see wasn’t something that disappeared quite so easily. Every now and then, she would be assaulted by an inescapable anxiety.

Does my hand here truly have five fingers? Am I just of the belief that I have two arms and two legs, and in truth, there are pieces of my body missing? Or perhaps, does my face have a horrible scar on it, and everyone just won’t say anything about it?

Kuroka lost her sight when she was unable to avoid the sorcery fired off by a sorcerer, after all.

Maybe... that’s why I couldn’t answer...

Nephteros’ sister Nephy had told her the following.

“I may be able to heal your eyes.”

She was a high elf who manipulated miracles which differed in nature from sorcery. There was a possibility that her powers were capable of restoring the light to Kuroka’s eyes. That’s what Nephy told her. It wasn’t an opportunity she could obtain no matter how much she wished for it. It should have been something she jumped at immediately even if she had to run her face against the ground and beg.

And yet, I froze up, and I couldn’t speak.

She was scared. And Nephy didn’t scorn her, nor did she scold her. She just said that she would wait. She said it was fine to wait until Kuroka had properly sorted out her feelings.

There’s no way I could even compete.

A full month had passed since then, and Kuroka was still unable to take a step forward. She didn’t even register on the same scale as Nephy. That’s why Kuroka revered her.

Setting that aside, Kuroka shook her head and stood up.

“Now then, it’s about time for me to get to work. Kuu, please do be careful out there. It’s good that the town is lively today, but it’ll be all that more dangerous as well.”

“Okaaaaay. You take care too, Kuroka. Ah, wait a sec.”

Just as Kuroka went to pick up her cane, Kuu called her to a stop.

“Is something the matt... Huh? Kuu?”

Before she knew what was going on, Kuu had embraced Kuroka.

“Eheheh, mmmmm. It’s okay. Kuu will be with you forever, Kuroka.”

Those words made Kuroka’s heart feel at ease to a mysterious extent. Apparently Kuu had noticed Kuroka’s anxiety, and this was her answer.

“...Thank you. Let’s go have some cake or something when I get back.”

“Mm! Kuu will make something delicious!”

After being comforted by her kind roommate, Kuroka left the room.

“Ah! Kuroka! In front!”

“Hu— Hrk!”

A dull thud rang out from Kuroka’s head.

“Ah, sorry. Are you okay?”

The owner of that voice was the Angelic Knight Richard. Apparently he was carrying around some large piece of lumber and Kuroka walked into it. It was quite busy in the church today since it was Alshire Imera.

“That’s kinda what I’m worried about here...”

Kuroka’s kind roommate squatted down and rubbed her head.

And one hour later, in Kianoides’ shopping district.

In the end, I had to be helped by all sorts of people.

Even though she had a body that needed the help of others, she ended up getting more help than necessary.

“I even made Lilith and Selphy worry...” Kuroka inadvertently muttered.

Her two childhood friends, especially Lilith, were worrywarts, and they came to check up on her even after returning to Kianoides. She too was now working under Zagan, so she would show up basically once every two days.

Kuroka focused her mind, telling herself to get it together, as she recalled the contents of the scriptures. This was one of the few chances she could be useful to others without having to swing a sword. If she didn’t put all her effort into doing so, what was there for her to even do?

And just as she pulled herself together, a familiar scent reached

her nose.

All the fur on her body from the tips of her ears to the very ends of her tails stood up. There was no way she could forget it. This smell was precisely the reason Kuroka set down on the path of revenge.

This smell... it's the guy who attacked my village...!

It was the smell of her sworn enemy who had destroyed her people. Kuroka joined the dark side of the church, Azazel, and killed many sorcerers just for the purpose of killing this one.

Calm down. It's not definitively the case...

She didn't know if it was the exact same person, or one who just resembled them. Besides, when she was part of Azazel, she couldn't find the sorcerer no matter how much she searched. It was far too convenient for them to suddenly pop up in front of her like this. Kuroka tried to persuade herself of this, but her thumping heart brought back memories of that tragedy.

My revenge... is already over...

She gripped her cane tightly. Kuroka had once run wild full of hatred, and Zagan said nothing and accepted all of it. There was no need for him to do so, yet he let Kuroka unleash all her rage upon him. That's why Kuroka's revenge was already over.

But, I want to bring an end to it. Even if I don't, I want to ascertain who exactly they are.

Kuroka considered the time. She left the church already taking into consideration that she might get lost. She had quite a bit of time before she had to get to work. She only hesitated for but a few seconds before following that scent.

The bustling shopping district carried the smell of the body odor of the crowd, the dirt on the ground, and the dampness from the canal. And the specific smell she was chasing followed a narrow path which diverted from the shopping district.

The putrid smell coming from that direction appeared to be an alleyway. It was a gathering spot for beggars, waifs and robbers. Even though Kuroka had her sword cane, it wasn't a place for a blind girl to walk in to.

But, the scent goes this way.

Kuroka stepped into the alley, and strangely enough, couldn't sense anybody there. Normally the waifs would be around, and if they weren't, there would be one or two beggars laying around there. But now she didn't sense a single breathing being.

Kuroka didn't know. This was where Zagan was surrounded by waifs teaching them arts. And also where Lisette was saved by the silver-eyed sorcerer. Nevertheless, she knew something strange was going on. She carefully marched on, and could sense that someone was standing right in the middle of the alleyway.

It really is the same scent as that time.

At the same time that she was sure of this, she realized another scent was mixed in. It felt somewhat nostalgic. But, she couldn't remember who exactly it was. Kuroka gripped her cane tightly once more, as if to encourage herself.

"Who are you?"

And that's what she managed to wring out of her mouth. There was likely something else she should have been asking, she was self-aware of what she wanted to know the most.

And... why did you target my people?

Just what kind of reason did this person, who was most likely a sorcerer, have to attack them? It may have been a completely worthless and meaningless reason. Or perhaps, they had some sort of deep seated grudge. It was also entirely possible that their true target was the Moonless Sky in Kuroka's very hands.

Kuroka wanted to know, no matter which scenario it was. Just who was it who attacked her people? And having been asked that question, the person in the alleyway slowly turned toward her, slowly opened their mouth, and...

"You... are... Ku...ro...ka?"

An entirely unpredictable question. And an even more unpredictable voice. It was a familiar one.

"Wh...y...? that voice is..." The impossible had occurred. "That voice... is... Mom...?"

It was the voice she wanted to hear just once more, but should have been unable to hear ever again. The voice of her mother.

Why? Why is mom here?

Did this mean that her mother betrayed her people on the day of the attack? And just as that doubt came to mind, Kuroka immediately denied the possibility.

Mom died protecting me!

Her back was slashed, but she still embraced Kuroka and ran. Kuroka would never forget that warmth. The reason Kuroka was able to survive was because her mother managed to run all the way to the church.

Then... is this an illusion made with sorcery?

Did she already fall into her enemy's trap? Kuroka was shaken to the core as the one before her stretched out their hand. She surely should have run away. Even if she didn't, she was capable of dodging it. And yet, Kuroka was unable to even raise her voice in all her panic.

And then, a fingertip touched Kuroka's cheek.

"No!"

Kuroka reflexively tried to swat that hand away. However, she wasn't able to put any strength into it given her current state. Her

precious cane slipped through her hands and went flying elsewhere. However, Kuroka had no leeway to worry about that.

“Ow! Hooooooooaaaaawwt...?”

Kuroka’s heart jumped up like a bouncing ball, and unable to bear it, she sank to the floor and lost all energy in her body.

My body is... hot?

She couldn’t breathe.

She couldn’t put any strength into her arms and legs.

Her consciousness faded away.

And not knowing what exactly was happening to her body at all, Kuroka collapsed to the ground.



“Ah! It’s Shax! I scraped my knee! Fix it!” “Gimme candy!”

“Gimme money!” “Come live with us!”

“Gah! Can it you noisy brats! Go away! I have work to do today! Actually, don’t come talking all friendly like to a sorcerer dammit! I’ll eat you!”

After walking into the shopping district, Shax was swarmed by waifs that came out of nowhere. Contrary to his firm stature, he was a sorcerer with a rather inattentive face. He was somewhere in his mid-twenties with reddish brown short hair and stubble on his chin. He glared at the children with his glass-like eyes, but there was no vigor to it at all and made them laugh at him instead. It had been several months since he came to this city, but for some reason, these dirty children had gotten attached to him.

Dammit... this is why I hate coming out during the day!

Being no exception at all to the great majority of sorcerers, Shax had a habit of shutting himself into his gloomy laboratory. The only reason he was walking about in the shopping district in broad daylight was because someone had called for him.

After somehow managing to drive the children away, he entered a tavern. He took a look around, but didn’t spot who he was supposed to be meeting here.

Shax took a seat at one of the tables, and one of the waitresses came to take his order. She had pointy ears and silver hair that went all the way down to her waist. Her strong willed eyes were like golden moons, and her skin was dark. She was a rare dark elf, but also practically a celebrity here in Kianoides.

Huh? Why’s she in this kinda place?

Shax reflexively hid his face with the menu in his hands. It wasn’t like he would be troubled if she saw his face, but sorcerers were fundamentally shady characters. He hadn’t yet done anything to find fault with, but such behavior was essentially a conditioned reflex.

With the menu in his face, he didn’t notice that the elf’s face

completely stiffened up at his reaction. She only did so for but an instant, and then took out a small memo pad.

“Welcome. Will it just be the two of you?”

“Huh? I’m alone here... gah, the hell you following me all the way here for?!”

Before he knew it, one of the homeless children from before was there next to him, clinging to his robe.

“I’m hungry...”

The child looked up at him with pleading eyes, leading the dark elf to look at Shax with suspicion.

“What? He’s not a customer?”

“Missy, I’ll have a beer. He’ll have bread and milk.” Shax replied with a sigh.

“Very well.”

The dark elf scribbled on her memo and left without even a smile.

That was Nephteros, right? The one from the church?

He couldn’t understand what was going on at all. She didn’t seem to recognize him, or perhaps she just didn’t have any interest in him at all. After handing over the order to the kitchen, she went off to take orders from the other customers. A while later, she brought over their bread and drinks. Shax gave the child the bread and milk and drove him out of the tavern.

“Thanks Shax.”

“Yeah yeah, get lost already.” Shax yelled at the child, who smiled back and ran off. “...Dammit, why does this happen to me...”

He let out a sigh and returned to his seat, where he found a familiar face.

“Yo. You’re late.”

“Hey, Chief... that’s my drink...”

“No need to be such a cheapass.”

The sorcerer with a plainly unhealthy countenance, Barbatos, chugged away at Shax’s beer that he had yet to even touch himself.

“Aaah... Hey missy, one more beer.”

“Got it.”

The dark elf showed no signs of courtesy, but she didn’t prod any further. It may have been the case that she just didn’t want to get involved any further, though. After she placed another beer at their table, Shax sat down across from Barbatos and questioned him languidly.

“So? What do you want?”

“A bonus for you.”

Barbatos cut to the chase and dropped a bulky book onto the table. Usually a bonus would entail a pouch of money, and there was none of that in sight, but after seeing the title of the book, Shax let out

a whistle.

“Phew, a grimoire as a bonus, huh? That Archdemon sure is lavish, huh?”

Sorcerers certainly needed money, but grimoires weren't necessarily obtainable just by having a large amount of money. Not only that, this was a grimoire written by Archdemon Zagan's confidant, Enchantress Gremory. Judging from the title, the contents of the book differed somewhat from her field of specialty, but such a grimoire would still go for over a thousand gold coins at an auction among sorcerers. Depending on the occasion, it was entirely possible it would even go for five times that price.

Shax didn't even suspect why it was that he was getting a bonus, or why a sorcerer like Barbatos was handing it over to him personally. And watching Shax celebrate all on his own, Barbatos slipped a single piece of paper across the table in front of him.

“Wh-What's this...?”

After picking up the paper, Shax's face froze up completely. It was addressed to Shax, but the sender wasn't his so called boss.

“Hey, Barbatos. What's going on here?”

“Hah? Like I know. I was told to hand that to you is all... Seriously, I'm fed up with everyone treating me like a damn handyman.”

Shax was left at a loss.

I have a bad feeling about this...

He didn't have particularly good intuition as a sorcerer, but getting an order from someone he didn't usually get orders from couldn't lead to anything good. In the worst case, he would end up betraying his boss. It was something that Shax himself had already done. And in most cases, once he saw the contents, there was no backing out. As Shax continued to glare at the letter without opening it, Barbatos let out a mutter like he just remembered something.

“...Anyway, the hell is that elf doing working here?”

“Now you ask? Like I know anything about it.”

“Hah? I thought she was supposed to go out with that crybaby today.”

“Huh...? Crybaby?”

It was tiring just having a conversation with this man. Shax was getting a headache and pinched his brow. And yet, Barbatos replied in an unexpectedly docile tone.

“The crybaby and the elf didn't say anything about coming here. So... they kept quiet and snuck in here? That's a little bad ain't it...?”

“What's that? You being told to keep an eye on that girl or something?”

Well, elves were extremely rare and quite valuable to sorcerers.

An Archdemon would surely want to manage the presence of such a race in their domain.

After being questioned by Shax, Barbatos began digging his pinky into his ear in as if he found this all bothersome.

"It ain't like that, but it may be bad for her to be playing around where that ass Zagan and that crybaby can't see her... for now, that is."

"For now? Did something happen?"

Shax was somewhat interested, but right now, his problem was the letter in front of his eyes. And just as he reached out for his beer wondering whether he should actually open it or not...

"You don't know? There's some idiot out there who started a rare species hunt."

Hearing the phrase 'rare species hunt,' Shax inadvertently knocked over his drink.

"Gah?! The hell are you doing?!"

"O-Oh... my bad."

Shax drew a simple magic circle in the air with his finger, returning the knocked over mug to where it was along with all of its spilled contents which had poured over the table, the floor and Barbatos. It wasn't all that complicated in terms of sorcery, but it took a fair amount of skill to put it together so quickly on the spot. In other words, Shax was a sorcerer who possessed a fair amount of skill that wouldn't put him far behind Barbatos.

Barbatos pointed a sharp gaze at Shax. His flippant attitude had completely vanished. His gaze was like that of a hound who had just found its prey.

"You know something about these hunts?"

Barbatos was a former Archdemon candidate. He was in a position where if it were not for Zagan, he would likely have taken the seat of the Archdemon himself. This wasn't a situation that Shax could just try to brush off.

"No, it's the first I've heard of this one specifically."

"By this one, you mean you know of something else?"

Shax nodded with a sour expression on his face.

"There was a guy who caused a similar incident a while back. He went about hunting and killing rare species without letting anything get in his way. According to the rumors, he killed and obliterated some one hundred species."

Barbatos' eyes shot open.

"Oh, I remember now. Was it five years ago? Something like that did happen if I recall. It only showed up in the papers here in Kianoides, but it was a big enough fuss that the church was putting together a subjugation force... In the end, that guy got taken care of I

think?"

"Yeah. This town was under the head Archdemon Marchosias' protection so it was no skin off his nose I guess. But that guy ended up making a move in Marchosias' domain."

"...And Marchosias took care of him?"

"It's true that Marchosias dealt with him. But, I don't know if he's dead."

In other words, his whereabouts were unknown.

Barbatos then put his hand to his chin in thought.

"So that means... he's going wild again now that Marchosias is dead?"

"No, I think the probability for that is fairly low."

"Why?"

"Do you think an Archdemon's punishment would end with just a reprimand? He's likely met a fate where he was better off dying. Even if he's alive, he's probably beyond any recovery. If not..."

Shax was unable to speak of the rest.

If not... there's no way I could be alive.

That's because Shax was deeply involved with that incident. If the culprit was still alive, he would surely start by killing Shax first. The fact that this hadn't happened could even be thought of as proof that the culprit was dead.

Shax wasn't sure how Barbatos interpreted his silence, but Barbatos simply nodded in agreement.

"Well, they say even the other Archdemons trembled in fear trying not to offend Marchosias. There's no way his punishment would be so half-assed."

"That's how it is."

Shax wasn't lying, but he wasn't telling the truth.

The one who did him in wasn't a sorcerer.

He didn't remember their name. It was possible that they named themselves before Shax, but the burden of Shax's sins were far too heavy for him.

A strange power... or was it a weapon? In any case, it was someone wielding a strange power...

At the very least, it was a power which differed from sorcery, Sacred Swords and even what the high elf at Archdemon Zagan's side could do. Shax believed they were acting under Marchosias' command, but there was a major question as to why someone who wasn't a sorcerer was being given orders by the preceding Archdemon. An Archdemon relying on a power other than sorcery was like denying their entire life.

In any case, Shax saw the culprit get struck down by that power. However, the one being struck down at that time seemed to know

what it was. If he recalled correctly...

“Seraph Hunter...”

Barbatos knit his brows at the name Shax reflexively muttered.

“What’s that?”

“Huh? Oh, nothing. It’s something I heard while that incident was going on. No idea what it means. The one who said it is probably dead too.”

Shax didn’t know what Seraph Hunter referred to. However, he did at least feel that it was something ominous.

“You know something about it, Chief?”

“...No clue. For now, at least.”

Barbatos’ answer seemed to imply something, but he showed no signs of provided any further details himself.

Well, it’s got nothing to do with me.

However, Barbatos wasn’t so dimwitted that he would let Shax trying to dodge certain details go by.

“So, you don’t wanna say that guy’s name that much?”

“Erk.”

Shax’s body jolted noticeably.

Shit. He saw through me.

Unlike Archdemon Zagan, this man wasn’t fussy about the means he took to accomplish his goals. He was a truly straightforward sorcerer. He had many ways of avoiding a topic when speaking to someone who surpassed him in power. He tried thinking of an excuse for a few seconds, but gave up anyway. He then spoke the culprit’s name in a heavy tone.

“...Shere Khan.”

Even Barbatos was left staring in surprise and stiffening up.

“...Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh, well... how do I put it...? My bad.”

And now it was Shax’s turn to be taken aback.

“Have you mellowed out?”

“Huh? The hell would you think that?”

Barbatos had no self-awareness of the fact and simply stared back at Shax with a puzzled look. In the past, this man would never apologize no matter what he blurted out. Although, the fact that he wouldn’t prod any further was something for Shax to be grateful for.

It’s already over anyway...

Shax chugged down his drink in one go as if to clear away such painful memories. And watching him do so, Barbatos muttered indifferently.

“...You know that spilled all over, right?”

“PFFFFT?!”

Shax knocked over this drink once more, and returned everything back to normal again while on the verge of tears. As he did, Barbatos stood up with enough vigor that it felt like the table would flip.

“Hey, cut me some slack here, I don’t wanna clean the floor any more than this.”

Shax raised his voice in complaint, but Barbatos couldn’t hear him at all.

“Huh? Why... is she here...?”

“Uhhh, Chief?”

“I’ve got something to do. We’re done here.”

Barbatos didn’t wait for his reply and disappeared into his own shadow.

“The hell got in him...? Gah, so I gotta pay the bill?”

All this despite the fact that the only thing Shax had to drink was the beer he spilled on the floor. After reluctantly footing the bill, Shax wandered off into the shopping district.

So... I guess I can’t just leave this thing sealed, huh...?

He finally had a break from work, but he also wasn’t in the mood to shut himself in his laboratory now that he had heard something unpleasant. Displeasing a close associate to the boss was also the worst thing to do next to displeasing the boss himself.

“Man... It’s tough being an underling.”

Despite having a fairly large frame, Shax was now hunched over as he walked down the streets, when suddenly, he felt like he heard the sounds of a scuffle happening in a nearby alley.

Rare species hunt.

That unpleasant information overlapped with the faces of the alleyway waifs.

There aren’t any rare species or anything among those brats, right...?

However, those children were so dirty that it was sometimes hard to tell what race they were to begin with. It wouldn’t be all that strange for some rare species to be present among them.

“...Dammit. I’m a weakling here. Can you cut me some slack with all this violence?”

Shax walked over to the alley, hid himself against a wall, and took a look inside. The scuffle seemed to have ended, as he was unable to see anyone down there.

Or not, there’s someone there?

Taking a closer look, he could spot something moving on the ground. It seemed that someone had collapsed after perhaps being injured.

Tch... I really should’ve just pretended not to hear anything.

Now that he saw it, he couldn’t just ignore it.

“Hey, is someone there?”

Shax tried raising his voice. Even if someone troublesome was around, he could just avert his gaze and leave. He waited for a few seconds, but he didn't sense any movement in the alley other than the one squirming on the ground.

I'm just a common sorcerer without any outstanding features here. You won't get anything good out of tormenting me, you know?

He whispered a warning in his own mind and carefully drew nearer to the collapsed figure. Fortunately enough, there didn't seem to be anyone dangerous around just waiting to attack. And after arriving at the fallen figure, he was left with a completely anticlimactic discovery.

The hell?

It appeared that there were just some clothes on the ground in the shape of a person. What was squirming around was a single black cat. Shax could only let out a strained laugh at steeling himself so ludicrously.

"I was wondering what kind of ruckus was going on here, but it's just you, huh, kitty cat? Did you get in a fight or something?"

Shax really was losing his touch if he was getting scared over a fight between stray cats. He really was far too timid were that the case. He scooped up the cat in his arms and looked into its red eyes. It was about big enough to hold in one hand, so it was still a kitten. Perhaps because it was scared, its nose was twitching as it sniffed about. It really brought out one's desire to protect it with its behavior.

Today's been nothing but a string of crap, so this is kinda soothing.

Black cats also happened to be a symbol of good luck back in Shax's hometown. Though it seemed there were other regions of the world which thought of them as misfortune too. He liked cats enough that he even once considered writing a book speculating on the discrepancy in such superstition. After taking a closer look at the cat, he suddenly realized that its eyes weren't focused anywhere.

"Hey, are you blind? That's not a fresh wound, huh?"

As a small time sorcerer, Shax at least had knowledge of healing sorcery. If it was an injury caused by the scuffle that occurred moments ago, then he would be able to heal it. But this injury appeared to be quite old. Having said that, it didn't look to be a birth defect either.

A pet cat then? But it's got no collar.

Its fur was also so pretty that it didn't look like a stray either. Shax cocked his head to the side curiously, then noticed that a piece of cloth was stuck in the cat's paws.

"What's this?"

By the time he noticed it, the cloth fluttered down to the floor. It was unmistakably a pair of woman's underwear.

Why the hell is there underwear laying around here...?

It was far too clean to be something that was laying around outside for a while. Shax looked around to see if it was possible that someone was hanging laundry in the area, but none of the houses here appeared equipped for that. He entertained the thought that some idiot sorcerer failed in trying some sort of transformation sorcery, but the clothes laying around didn't match that.

And perhaps because Shax's bewilderment was being passed to it, the cat suddenly began struggling in his arms.

"Ow, hey, don't scratch me, that hurts. I'm not gonna eat you."

It was struggling, but it was still a kitten, and Shax was still a sorcerer. This made it all feel quite playful, and was conversely quite charming to him.

Oh well. It'll probably die if I just leave it here, guess I'll look after it for a bit.

Shax was a sorcerer, but he was still human. It wasn't like he was incapable of feeling solitude. It wouldn't be all that bad to at least have a kitten as a roommate. Moreover, even if he tried to heal its eyes, he wasn't able to do anything for the kitten with the sorcery he had on hand.

Hang on, first it needs a name.

After thinking it over for a bit, Shax grinned broadly at the cat.

"Okay! You're Blacky! Be thankful that I'm the one who found you Blacky! Blacky for a black cat. Hahaha! You like it?"

The cat emphatically bit him instead of replying. It was so vigorous with its response that it even brought a tear to his eye.

"Oooh, I'm glad you like it...! I get it, seriously, stop biting, blood's coming out!"

And perhaps having understood him, the cat stiffened up as if sinking into despair, and stopped biting him. And so, Shax headed back home with a hop in his step as if his earlier depression had completely vanished.





“...Oh my. Now this has become quite troublesome.”

A voice rang out in the alleyway after Shax left with the black cat. Following that, a cloud of flapping bats gathered together. It wasn't just one or two, or even ten, but hundreds of bats, creating a black cloud. A thin arm then stretched out of the cloud of bats, followed by a black frilly dress. A girl emerged with tied up blonde hair and her pretty shoes tapped the ground. Her eyes snapped open, revealing her golden pupils, and she had long fangs peeking through her lips. After pulling out her creepy looking stuffed doll covered in stitches, the cloud of bats vanished. It was the vampire, Alshiera.

“So that girl is a four ears. Atavism is certainly possible, but to think one would show with this timing... or perhaps, it is precisely because of this timing?”

The distinction between the tabaxi and the cait sith was quite ambiguous, but long ago there was a clear difference between them. Kuroka was the only four ears in the entire Adelhide family. Moreover, she was the one the Moonless Sky recognized as its wielder. There was a sufficient reason to believe she possessed the lost ability of her people. Surely, the Adelhide family had made preparations for that time to come.

“But, the Adelhides are no more.”

They perished, leaving Kuroka all alone. Alshiera felt fairly indebted to them. That may have been why Lilith weighed on her mind more than necessary. She meant to be self-aware of this fact.

Alshiera walked over to a corner of the alley and picked up a long rod from the rubbish there. It seemed that Shax failed to notice it because it was buried in the garbage. This was the sword cane that Kuroka dropped, the Moonless Sky. After brushing off the dirt and cleaning it up, she hugged it to her chest like a mother embracing a child.

“How troublesome, Azazel. Does this mean that I've gotten involved I wonder?”

She was supposed to be the only one present here, but she spoke as if talking to a dear friend. No reply came back to her, but the vampire nodded in agreement.

“Yes... you're right. That girl is also one of my cute fawns, one who follows the great Silver-Eyed King. There is no way I can just leave her be.”

Alshiera muttered, then wrenched open the back of her stuffed doll and jammed the sword cane within. It was quite clear that it wouldn't fit, but the sword cane was simply sucked into the doll's back and vanished.

She then languidly turned toward the shopping district. It had suddenly become far more lively than before. It was as if a festival was going on.

“No... Now that I think of it, it’s a carnival.”

It was a church festival which was held once a year. And in an unusual turn, Alshiera’s smile crumbled, and she let out an irritated sigh.

“Alshiere Imera... what poor taste in names. This is surely my dear brother’s doing. Aaah, how vexing!”

She suddenly threw her stuffed doll to the ground and began trampling on it. Looking closely, the doll appeared to be wearing a gentleman’s vest, and could perhaps be seen as a male. After trampling it for a while, Alshiera was satisfied with herself and picked the stuffed doll back up. She brushed off the dirt and once more hugged it preciously. She then let out a strange laugh.

“Heeheehee, this is practically a crossroads. People who have met before will pass again. As if all fates that began five years ago will cross right here.”

Alshiera picked up the hem of her skirt and span around on the spot.

“From time to time, an encounter will change a person. Sometimes it broadens their view, sometimes they’ll gain someone to protect, sometimes it will remind them of fate, sometimes it will even overturn their sense of values. Those who met here have had such fates.”

Alshiera sang to the sky and gently lifted the hems of her skirt with a curtsy before looking at the entrance to the alley.

“Just how will you change I wonder?”

A single figure stood at the entrance to the alley, a sorcerer with the face of a lion.

Chapter III: It's the Day of the Festival, but the Dead Are Wandering Around, so Apparently the Saint Has to Work

"Hang on, Selphy! How long do you plan on stirring that pot?! Come help over here already!"

"Come on, don't be like, all unreasonable Lilith. This stew will totally burn the second I look away from it."

"Lilith, Selphy will immediately fail if you rush her. You can't push her too much. I'll help you out there."

"Is it fine for you to be helping out with these things milady?"

The kitchen was in a complete frenzy. They were currently in a complete uproar over preparing a feast for over fifty people. Lilith was currently in charge of churning the fresh cream as it cooled down. Fresh cream changed in nature based on how it was stirred, so there was apparently a need for it to be done by hand. Lilith wailed over how exhausted she was getting from it.

"...Actually, now that I think of it, aren't I the princess of the succubae? Why does a noble succubus like myself have to cook such strenuous meals? Ah, Sir Raphael, it's beginning to harden, is this about right?"

"Let's see... Mm, that's fine. All that's left is to let it cool in the storeroom."

"Understood. Sweets on the continent sure have improved, huh? This is the first time I've seen such a thing."

"Are there no frozen sweets in Liucaon?"

"We've got a sweet made of shaved ice and sugar, but I don't think we have anything creamy like this."

Lilith brought the bowl of cream down to the storeroom in admiration. The storeroom of this castle was equipped with sorcery to cool its contents. It was originally where Zagan threw all his milk and jerky, but Raphael and Nephy cleaned it up and made use of it for both storage and cooking.

Thanks to that, they were able to create high-class frozen sweets with ease. To create such a thing without sorcery required one to purchase fairly expensive ice as well as a large amount of a special

mineral called saltpeter. It was an amount of money that only the richest nobles and royalty could afford. Thus, the recipe for such sweets was something prized by the church. If not for his position as an Archangel, Raphael would never have been able to read it.

There were three girls in charge of cooking the feast along with Raphael. All of them were wearing a similar outfit to what Nephy usually wore, a one-piece dress and an apron. Setting aside the siren Selphy, the succubus Lilith was still inexperienced with cooking, having only come to the castle one month ago. However, even as she complained about everything, she properly did all the work and it could be said that she fully adapted to the castle life.

Foll had been helping in the kitchen up until Zagan gained a whole lot of followers, so she was cooking as well. Actually, a large bulk of the pots and ladles in the kitchen were currently under her control using sorcery, so one could say that most of the burden was on her shoulders.

The frenzy wasn't limited to the kitchen either. All of the sorcerers within the castle were currently running about in one way or another.

After Lilith returned from the storeroom, Selphy rushed over to her with a smile.

"Come on Lilith. You've got cream on your cheek ya know?"

It likely got there when she put her hand to her face after mixing the cream for so long. Selphy pointed that out, then scooped up the cream with her finger.

"Hyaa, d-don't touch me all of a sudden... Huh? You're eating it?"

"Uh, I mean, like, isn't it a waste? It's so tasty ya know?"

"Aau... Aaaauuuu!"

Lilith squirmed about in agony and turned bright red as Selphy looked on in curiosity and once more raised her voice cheerfully.

"Oh yeah, little lady, mine's all done and ready! It tastes great!"

"Got it. Look after the salad dressing next then."

"Roger! Eheheh, this is awesome. I get to taste test so much today!"

Foll's sorcery was definitely able to handle the work of multiple people at once, but it was unable to put the more delicate touches on seasoning and controlling heat. It was necessary for someone to personally handle the final touches and taste test each dish. That's why Selphy and Lilith were indispensable. And looking over such a lively and cheerful kitchen, Raphael couldn't help but smile.

Watching over this uproar makes it perfectly clear what exactly Ashiere Imera is.

It turned out to be a blessing that he had managed to drive Zagan out of the castle. Foll noticed his smile and cocked her head to the side.

“Raphael, something wrong?”

“No, I’m just relieved that it seems to be going well.”

“Mm. Looks like we’ll finish before Zagan is back.”

Foll’s secret plan was none other than holding a party for Alshire Imera, which Zagan likely knew nothing about.

“Zagan is always giving me the things I that I want but could never get myself. But, Zagan should be getting those things too.” Foll muttered meekly.

And what came to this little girl’s mind was a fun celebration of Alshire Imera involving everyone. It was a tradition from the church, but a festival was still a festival. Foll’s wish was a simple and pure thought that most sorcerers simply forgot. There were more than a few sorcerers who would recall such emotions longingly and empathized with her.

Zagan’s subordinates saw Foll’s behavior and cooperated with her unconditionally. Before she knew it, the entire castle except for its lords were now merrily at work decorating away. It was a perfectly natural flow that it was all kept secret from Zagan and Nephry.

The preparations for the appetizers and desserts were now complete, and they were now moving on to the main course. Now that they got this far, there was no longer a need for Raphael’s constant supervision. And just when he was considering checking in on the other sorcerers...

“Raphael.” Foll suddenly called the butler’s name in a sharp tone.

“I know. It seems we have an uninvited guest.”

As the one responsible for the castle’s defenses while its lord was absent, Raphael was given a certain portion of the barrier’s capabilities. He was notified by the barrier the moment an intruder appeared. All judgment as to whether the traps should be activated or not was left to him as well.

Foll’s senses have certainly gotten quite sharp ever since coming back from Liucaon.

Foll was being protected by the barrier, but she wasn’t given control of a portion of the barrier’s functions like Raphael was. Nevertheless, she was able to determine the presence of a visitor all the way at the edge of the barrier, far away from the castle, the moment they set foot within. It was difficult for Raphael to determine whether he should be rejoicing over her growth, or lamenting over the fact that her growth was inevitable.

“I just happen to have some free time now. I shall go receive them.” Raphael said, shaking his head.

“Are you fine on your own?”

Raphael was left with a strained smile at the young girl’s consideration.

“Receiving guests is the duty of the butler. You have your own damn work to do, don’t you?”

“...Mmm. But, something’s weird. Be careful.”

Raphael stared back at Foll in wonder.

For Foll to say such a thing as she is now... does that mean the intruder is just that powerful?

It wasn’t determined that their visitor was an enemy, but it appeared he was better off steeling himself upon receiving them.

“Understood. I’ll be careful.”

Raphael brushed the little girl’s head briefly, then headed toward the castle’s exit. After passing through the gate and proceeding through the forest, he found a single figure waiting there. They wore a hood low over their eyes and had a robe covering their large frame. They were breathing in ragged breaths in an ominous manner, making it difficult to tell if they could even be communicated with.

Although, it’s not entirely out of the question that this is one of my liege’s guests.

Zagan had gained even more followers upon returning from Liucaon. At a glance, this appeared to be an intruder, but it was possible that they were an unexpectedly upright person if talked to. Raphael didn’t really want to admit it, but both Zagan and himself were categorized as such. For that reason, Raphael did his best to put on his most friendly ‘I can’t bear not killing you for another second’ smile.

“I know not who you are, but my liege is currently absent. Even if you are torn limb from limb, there are none here to stop it.”

His first choice of words was practically a declaration of war, but Raphael’s intent was to give a completely serious warning to his guest. And naturally enough, the hooded guest, mostly likely a sorcerer, leaped into action.

Raphael was unarmed. He was unarmed, yet wasn’t.

“Fool.”

He placed his right hand against his artificial left hand. His artificial palm let out a bright light, and a large hilt poked out of it. The artificial arm that he was given by Foll was the Sacred Sword Metatron’s sheathe itself.

Raphael drew his Sacred Sword and aimed it at the hooded intruder. The most dreadful. The sorcerer hunter. These were the dishonorable titles given to Raphael while he served as an Archangel. There were few in the world who knew that he’d killed close to five hundred sorcerers out of simple self-defense.

Even in his one-armed state, Raphael showed no signs of his skills becoming dull as he slashed in at the intruder’s torso. The only difference from before was that the strike didn’t bisect the intruder,

but instead let out a dull thud and planted itself firmly into their waist.

“Gaah?!”

The intruder groaned in agony as they were sent flying back into a thick tree and ceased moving. They likely had multiple broken ribs, but were still alive.

“Hmm, it is just as my liege said. The Sacred Sword is strong enough not to break even when striking with the flat of the blade.”

Setting aside repelling arrows or the like, there were many who believed striking with the flat of the blade could conversely do more harm than good for their sword. This applied doubly so for a holy relic like a Sacred Sword, though Raphael only ever treated it like a tool he couldn't exchange for another.

If he kept that up however, he would just continue to completely cleave all who approached him as he did before, so Zagan told him to do this as a means to hold back. Having safely avoided his five hundredth kill, Raphael removed the intruder's hood to confirm their identity. And looking down at what was revealed, he knit his brows.

“Hm...? A horn? Is this a unicorn?”

They were a race who possessed a crystal-like horn on their forehead. And though it was beautiful, what was more amazing was that legends said that they could communicate with other worlds using that horn. They were a race of fairies who were lined up with among the strongest when it came to both mana and physical abilities. Precisely because of this they were hunted to extinction by sorcerers, and were supposed to have perished in some desolate corner of the world.

In any case, it was terrific that he managed to finish things without delivering a killing blow. Raphael ruminated over whether he should tie them up or treat them. The unicorn then opened its eyes and fixated them on Raphael. Their eyes were blood red, and they had two fangs protruding from their mouth.

“It couldn't be...!”

“GAAAAH!”

The intruder lunged at Raphael, not with sorcery, but with their fangs.

“...I see, undead... moreover, the Night Clan.”

Raphael grasped the vampire's face with his artificial hand and observed it as it squirmed about. It wasn't all that strange for a unicorn to transform into a vampire, but he still felt there was something strange about it. And with the intruder's face still firmly grasped in his hand, he looked up at the sky.

“Hmm...? I thought the Night Clan detested being out in the daylight.”

The weather was terrific today and the skies were clear. Even though they were in the forest, there was plenty of sunlight coming down on them. It would be a different story if it were a vampire on Alshiera's level, but the one before his eyes was so weak that they were defeated with a single strike with the flat of his blade.

"So, is it something entirely different from the Night Clan?"

Raphael wasn't able to come up with an answer on his own.

My liege may know something, though...

There were no records in the church that Raphael knew of which documented this sort of existence. And as he spent his time leisurely contemplating this, another irregularity began taking form in the intruder's body.

"Uoooooh..."

Just as Raphael heard a strange groan come from its covered mouth, the intruder's body began crumbling to pieces. The Night Clan was capable of transforming their bodies into bats or fog, but this one was turning to sludge.

Sludge... It reminded him entirely of an incident that occurred several months ago, the residual thoughts of the Demon Lord that the Archdemon Bifrons summoned forth. He felt it was very similar to that being.

I wanted to take it alive, but I don't have that leisure anymore I see.

If this were a monster of similar caliber, there was a possibility for it to swell in size endlessly if he didn't dispose of it completely. If that were to occur, their Alshiere Imera celebration would go out the window. Raphael brought his Sacred Sword to the fore, but suddenly stopped.

"Let's see. Shall I test the power my liege bestowed upon me here?"

Raphael muttered to himself as he let go of the intruder's face and took his distance. He held his Sacred Sword in his right hand and thrust out his artificial left hand. The sides of his arm opened up as if it had other compartments besides the one hiding his Sacred Sword. Finally, a lens-like object protruded from his palm and light began converging in it.

"Burn to ash — Orobas."

It was a flame of light. This was not the power of the Sacred Sword Metatron. This was an accumulation of aura which surpassed the Sacred Sword in the shape of a flame. And Raphael fired it at the intruder.

The flames spread out for but an instant. And as they dissipated, there was no more sludge, no more intruder, just nothing. The opening in Raphael's left arm let out steam, and returned to its original shape.

“Such is the breath of Wise Dragon Orobas. It’s wasted on such a weak opponent, do forgive me.”

Wise Dragon Orobas’ blood flowed through Raphael’s veins. However, Raphael was no sorcerer, and possessed no means of putting that power to practical use. All he was capable of was momentarily amplifying his physical abilities and regenerating even fatal wounds.

So Zagan gave him the means of unleashing a dragon’s breath using the artificial arm as a medium. This was the reason Zagan gave this man full authority over the castle despite not being a sorcerer. Raphael confirmed the condition of his arm, then shifted his attention toward the city his lord was currently visiting.

“Now then, this wasn’t an opponent my liege would have any trouble with, but I haven’t a clue as to what they were.”

Raphael prayed that nothing would happen to Zagan, Nephy and Kuroka, who were all in town. And even as he worried for those he served, the butler turned back and returned to his official duties.



“I said that I wouldn’t inquire further...”

Zagan was now headed to the church after parting with Kimaris. His search for Marc had come to a stalemate, but he had more planned for the day than just that.

It’s a faint prospect, but I should pass the Memorandum to my subordinates at the church. And then there’s Kuroka.

It was about a month now since he’d seen her face to face. The last time was on the uninhabited island in Liucaon. He did believe that the matter she was brooding over had improved since then somewhat thanks to Lilith and Selphy. Nevertheless, she never came to see Nephy.

Well, it’s not guaranteed that Nephy can heal her either. It’s understandable for her to be anxious.

Due to such circumstances, Zagan would have been worried about her even if Raphael hadn’t said anything. It may have been that he was the one who was looking for an opportunity to go see her. Such was the case, but...

“What’s with all this revelry?”

Every shop in sight was decorated with red and white ribbons and curtains. The people walking through town were happily chatting about Alshiere Imera. A whole bunch of shops were selling sugary looking baked goods, and there looked to be people walking around handing them out to children too.

Zagan was of the belief that a church’s celebration would be more solemn, but apparently it was some festival where people made merry, dressed up and lined the streets with stalls. There were at least choirs singing hymns in the streets much as one would expect of a church

celebration, though.

Kimaris told him to pretend he hadn't seen anything, but that would prove to be quite difficult with it flooding his entire field of vision like this.

It doesn't seem like anything that would inconvenience me like Kimaris said, though...

He just couldn't understand why people were making such a ruckus over it.

"...Whatever, looks like they're having fun, so it doesn't really matter I guess."

Or rather, if he did know about it beforehand, he would have brought Nephy and Foll here to play.

It looks like they would really enjoy this, but will it still be going on tomorrow?

It would be truly regrettable for him if it were only a one-day affair. He became fully aware of this on his visit to Liucaon, but enjoying 'normal happiness' was quite hard to do.

After walking through town with a hazy feeling in his chest, Zagan approached a tavern near the church. This was the place where he had first met Raphael, who he thought was an enemy at the time but now served as Zagan's butler. This was also the place where he and Barbatos would come to drink once in a while. And just as he casually glanced toward it...

"The Lord cometh. The Lord cometh. Oh, the Lord cometh. Let thy shriveled heart bloom. Blessed love power. The Lord loveth. The Lord loveth. Oh, the lord loveth."

Zagan heard the voice of his granny subordinate mixed in with a choir. It was Gremory, the one Kimaris went to chase after parting with Zagan. She managed to slip into the choir by taking on the form of a small girl. She had twisted goat horns poking from her head, but was neatly dressed in pure white religious garments.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Zagan really couldn't just leave her be, and as he drew nearer, the boys and girls of the choir began to make a fuss.

"Oh, it's that Archdemon person." "We see him a lot lately, huh?" "He's not with that elf lady today." "Is that girl with the horns his friend?" "Huh, who is that girl, anyway?"

The children showed no signs of fear at all and were actually rather inquisitive, leaving Zagan with a slight headache. Gremory then put her fingers to her lips in an attempt to shush him.

"My liege, you're too loud. I finally managed to shake off Kimaris here."

"...Don't trouble Kimaris too much. If you were planning on hiding, then don't go adding your love power crap to the hymn in the

first place.”

The lyrics had become incomprehensible gibberish partway through, and even the other children were completely perplexed by them. Gremory however, put her hand to her childish chin in satisfaction.

“Hmph, I sense a rich scent of love power drifting over from you my liege. You were surely worrying about how to invite Lady Nephy to this festival weren’t you, nyaaagh!”

“Shut it. I’ll slug you.”

“You already hit me, my liege...”

He at least held back unlike when he would strike Barbatos, but he did smack her on the head. Zagan then grabbed the tearful Gremory by the nape of the neck and turned to the children.

“Uhh... Sorry for getting in the way. Carry on.”

“Bye bye Mister Archdemon.”

The children waved to him energetically, leaving him once more with a headache as he waved back. And since he was preoccupied with them, Zagan failed to notice that Gremory was chuckling as if accomplishing some sort of objective as he once more headed toward the church. Now a fair distance from the tavern, Zagan questioned the little granny.

“So? What are you doing here?”

“It’ll take a long time to explain... Let’s see... Have you noticed that there is a strange presence flowing through the town?”

“...You’re right, there’s some sort of mana in the air different from that of my subordinates.” Zagan replied, knitting his brows.

It vanished the moment Zagan thought he had found a trace of it, so he had yet to identify where exactly it was coming from.

I created the barrier around the city to react to any aggressive sorcery, after all.

Kianoides was a prominent metropolis even when taking into account the entire continent. It was only natural for sorcerers unrelated to Zagan to come and go, so he set it up in such a way that they could pass through without question as long as they didn’t cause any trouble. If he didn’t, the barrier would be reacting all day long, and he would end up missing any irregularity he should be reacting to. It didn’t seem that Gremory was just out here to screw around...

“An enormous accumulation of love power is overflowing from absolutely everyone! Like I could stand to shut myself quietly inside the castle when I can experience an unrivaled bittersweet aroma of love power just by walking around town!”

“Keep this up and I’ll hand you over to Orias.”

“I’m joking. I’ll lick the soles of your boot or anything you want, so please forgive me.” The granny immediately slammed her head

against the ground. "Well, setting that aside... I thought to offer you a word of advice, my liege."

"Advice?"

The old lady never really had any worthwhile to say when she had advice to offer.

But, I guess it's also true I can't really ignore this.

Zagan and Nephy's lives were so far removed from a 'normal life' that the two of them were far too ignorant when it came to what it was lovers normally did. Even the knowledge that a date was something for the two of them to enjoy together was advice that came from Gremory. He had a really bad feeling about it, but he really couldn't ignore it after all.

"What is it?"

"Keeheeh, no need to glare so. My liege, you have a faint understanding that today is a festival called Alshire Imera correct?"

"I haven't pried into it."

Zagan promised Kimaris not to say anything. His dignity as a king wouldn't allow him to break that promise. Such was the case, but Gremory simply nodded as if she'd seen through everything.

"I bet. Kimaris is so straight-laced and inflexible. But I do believe that ignoring it will prove to be a disadvantage for you, my liege."

"A disadvantage?"

Instead of answering, Gremory pointed to a passerby on the street. It was a young man. He wasn't wearing a costume, but had a large parcel with a ribbon on it in his hands. And for some reason, he had a strangely happy smile plastered on his face.

Before long, a young girl ran up to him. The young man hid the parcel behind him in a panic, and the girl clearly saw him do so. The two of them exchanged greetings in a fluster for a brief moment before he held the parcel out to her. And just what was it that happened next? The girl smiled greatly and embraced the man.

"What are they doing...? It looked like the man was handing over a gift?"

"That's it," the young Gremory then took on the tone of a wise old sage, "Alshire Imera has a tradition of presenting gifts to one's sweetheart!"

"Wh...at...?!"

Zagan looked up at the sky. It was already past noon. Not only that, he had yet to finish his business with Kuroka and his subordinates.

I haven't prepared a single thing for Nephy despite such a custom existing?!

This was a truly grave situation. Moreover, if he were to give out gifts, he wanted to think of something for Foll, Raphael and the others

too.

“Now, what will you do? Will you return to the castle empty-handed? Or will you abandon your duty and dedicate yourself to searching for presents?”

Zagan glared at the laughing granny... or rather, the laughing little girl, and ground his teeth.

The choice to not prepare gifts on such a day is clearly nil!

Zagan only just learned of what exactly Alshire Imera was, but he didn't think Nephy was oblivious to it when she spent time talking with Manuela and Chastille in town. Nephy surely realized that Zagan didn't know and chose to keep quiet. Even now, she was completely unable to coax him for presents, though he wanted her to realize that seeing her do so would be a reward for him.

However, Zagan couldn't let that stand.

But what do I do about Kuroka?

Zagan promised to answer his faithful butler's request. Moreover, this involved Raphael's foster daughter, one could say that she was like a cousin or niece to him. It was unthinkable for him to leave her be. Zagan felt like he had never been so cornered until this very moment. However, he didn't spend all that long anguishing over it. He looked to Gremory, and spoke with the dignity of an Archdemon.

“Don't underestimate me, Enchantress Gremory. I'll prepare a present for Nephy. I'll also go check on Kuroka's condition. Do you think me some narrow-minded king who has to choose one or the other?”

His voice was more than just overpowering, it was straight up aggressive and threatening, leaving Gremory wide-eyed.

“Now that's my Archdemon... yes, precisely so, that's precisely what makes you my liege!” Gremory trembled in delight and fell to a knee. “Then your servant Gremory ought to put all effort into aiding you, my liege... So, what do you plan to start with first?”

“...Hmmm, I'll start with Nephy's present.”

He would of course check on Kuroka, but her instincts were sharp precisely because she was blind. If he were to visit her while all restless, she could end up taking him into consideration instead.

“Keehee, I thought you would say that, my liege. How about it? I have a terrific shop in mind, so shall I escort you there?”

“Hmph. That's what makes you my right hand. Please do.”

Both Zagan and Gremory had yet to realize. Their actions here were about to set the gears in motion to drive the entire city into chaos.

A sorcerer with a large build emerged from the alley right behind them with a black cat in his arms, and was walking toward the church that Zagan was originally walking to.



“Okay, we’re here, Blacky. This’ll be your room from now on.”

They were currently in a small lodging house on the church grounds a little distance from the main building itself. This was the building where Shax and a few other sorcerers who served under Archdemon Zagan lived. They could respond immediately from here if they were called, and nobody would threaten them even if they did research that the Angelic Knights would find troublesome. It was an exquisitely convenient position to be in. This was surely an effect of the cordial relations between the Archdemon and the Archangel who served as the leader of the Unification Faction.

Shax cleared the mess of bottles from the table and placed down a basket with a flimsy looking blanket covering it. It was slightly dirty, but this was the only proper bedding in the room. He then placed the blind cat within it.

“Hahaha, ain’t it comfy? Yup yup, don’t you look happy?”

The black cat looked to be grimacing from the smell, but Shax was still laughing in high spirits.

“Okay, then.”

Shax hunched down and took a look at the cat once more. He gathered some mana at the tip of his finger and tried touching the its face here and there. There was no damage to its actual eyeballs. However, its pupils were not functioning at all, and the retinas deep within its corneas looked to be severely damaged.

Shax’s expression grew grim.

Hey now, is this damage from sorcery?

It was likely a sort of magical trap which used seeing it as a trigger to render one blind. It was possible for such sorcery to not only burn one’s retinas, but even one’s optic nerves. Shax possessed enough skill to more or less restore damage to the eyeball. However, damage to the optic nerves entered the territory of the brain.

The brain was considered unknown territory among many sorcerers even now. If one were to handle it poorly, even if the optic nerves were restored, there was a danger that other cerebral functions would be destroyed. An unstoppable sense of powerlessness welled up within him because of this.

Can I... do nothing at all again...?

It was about two months ago now. Several of the Angelic Knights of the church were battling with a certain chimera and were struck down. The chimera itself was finished off by the Archangel, but her subordinates who had been rendered completely bloodied were brought here for treatment.

Their injuries were beyond Shax’s abilities. It took all his effort just to keep them alive for a moment longer, just long enough for

them to meet their families one last time. And yet, the tattered dark elf who was carried along healed them with extreme ease. All that despite being quite broken down herself.

Having his patients saved was something to be happy about, yet a sense of powerlessness dominated Shax's heart. He was becoming more and more self-conscious of the fact that he was a wretched sorcerer.

Shax then gently brushed the black cat's head.

"Sorry Blacky. My crappy sorcery... can't..."

Heal you. The words crawled up his throat, but he swallowed them away. He was talking to a cat. He understood this, but as one who used sorcery to treat others, he couldn't speak such words in front of a patient. That was a boundary he could not cross, no matter how pitiful a sorcerer he was. And perhaps having sensed Shax's condition, the black cat licked his hand.

"Haha... what? You cheering me up? You sure are all cuddly when you wanna be, huh?"

The cat emphatically bit down on his hand instead of answering. Its fur was even standing on end, such was its menacing attitude. If he were to lose in obstinacy to such a small cat, it was better for him just to shut down his business as a sorcerer all together. Shax pulled himself together and stood back up.

"Right, there should be some other way."

If he couldn't heal the cat with the sorcery he knew, then he just had to think of a new means of doing so. If he were to stop just because he encountered a wall, he would never progress any further. Those known as sorcerers would not pardon such an unreasonable reality. They were all fools who tried to topple such irrationality.

For now, is this, huh...?

Shax looked down at the grimoire next to the cat's basket. He had a somewhat bad premonition and had yet to check it, but this was certainly an extravagant reward for a sorcerer. It was only appropriate for him to start searching through it.

"...Oops, gotta feed Blacky first, huh? What do cats eat again? Hey, will milk do for now?"

"Meow."

There was no way he should have gotten a response from a cat who couldn't understand human language, but it meowed as if to tell him that was fine.

Milk was apparently quite sacred at the church, and they were delivered fresh batches every morning from the local farms. Shax poured some out into a bowl and put it in front of the cat. It looked like it could tell the milk was there from the smell, but was still weary of it and wouldn't drink any. Looking over that in a charmed manner,

Shax picked up the grimoire and plunked down in a cheap looking sofa. Something he picked up in that alley then suddenly caught his attention.

“...Huh? Isn't it bad if I don't do something about this?”

It was the woman's clothing that he found scattered about around the cat. He brought them back with him in case they held some clue as to who the cat's owner was, but... some young woman's clothing was now scattered about in a sorcerer's room. Anyone who saw it would assume he was a criminal. Even if Shax found a sorcerer who tried to use the excuse “I found it lying around so I picked it up,” he would start by slugging them. Having said that, he felt like it would be bad to just get rid of them without permission. After puzzling over it for a while, Shax nodded to himself.

“I guess I'll just stuff them away in the back for now.”

Shax snapped his fingers, and the clothing folded itself and compressed into an unnaturally small bundle. It wasn't something as advanced as Barbatos' ability to open a door to subspace, but this was sorcery capable of folding space itself.

Before long, they shrank down to the size of a pack of cards and Shax tucked them away in his breast pocket. This was something that most sensible sorcerers were capable of, and “stuffing away something in the back” signified using such sorcery to them.

After taking care of the evidence... or rather, the troublesome goods in his hands, Shax finally opened the grimoire before him. The letter he received at the same time was still jammed between some pages, but he just carried on while pretending not to see it. After skimming through the pages quickly, Shax let out a sigh of admiration.

“Hmmm, a theory to visualize memories, huh?”

It was quite the sophisticated and complex theory, just as one would expect from a former Archdemon candidate. Though Shax had no way of knowing that the foundation of the theory in this grimoire was the Memorandum developed by Zagan, Gremory and Barbatos.

He felt like the black cat had already begun to bring him good luck. Shax was completely engrossed in flipping through all the pages of the grimoire.

Hey, can't I use this?

It was impossible to heal the black cat's eyes using his sorcery, but it may have been possible to substitute it. He was fully aware that the possibility excited a somewhat disgraceful feeling in him. He broke down the theory in his head, as he then turned his attention from the grimoire to the black cat.

“Hey, Blacky. If you could see again... what would be the first thing you want to see?”

His words should have really only been directed at himself, but the black cat's eyes opened wide in shock. The cat naturally didn't answer him, but turned its face in fright. Shax put on a strained smile and picked up the cat and put it in his lap.

"Haha, well, I guess that's scary, huh? I'm scared of the simple idea that I can't cure it, so my patient must be way more scared than that. That's not something I should even say to a patient, though."

He laughed as if poking fun at himself, but he wasn't joking at all.

I'm just a total sham trying to act like a doctor after all this time.

Nothing would change the fact that he had destroyed an entire village five years ago because he believed in something so worthless. So what if he managed to save just one little girl back then? Shax brought an end to all of it as a minimal means of atoning for his sins. And after that, he chose to become a doctor while still remaining a sorcerer. But in the end, that may have been nothing more than running away. After thinking it through once more, Shax shook off his thoughts.

"Haaah... That's no good. I'm remembering all this worthless crap 'cause he brought up that name."

The incident that Barbatos brought up, the rare species hunt, was a ridiculous story to Shax. The culprit was struck down before his very own eyes. Even if they survived, he knew as a specialist in healing that the wound that was inflicted couldn't be healed. Even if they were an Archdemon.

And just as he went looking for a cigarette to change his mood, he suddenly looked to the window and froze up completely. For looking back at him was a bizarre figure with red eyes.



"Who the hell?!"

Something with red eyes was vomiting a sludge-like substance. Cracks ran along the window upon coming into contact with it, and it shattered into pieces. However, Shax only froze up from the sudden occurrence for but an instant.

He grabbed the black cat and leaped off his couch. He would be fine as a sorcerer, but the cat was helpless before the fragments of glass pouring down. Shax rolled across his flimsy bed with the cat in his arms and got as far away from the window as he could.

After getting back up to his feet, he finally got a good look at the intruder's face. The one practically collapsing through the broken window was a young man. He was wearing a robe with a multitude of talismans hanging from his neck, so it was clear that he was a sorcerer.

However, he had a ruby-like crystal planted in his forehead. This was the first time Shax had seen this for himself, but he recalled

seeing the description of such a race in ancient documents.

“A carbuncle...?”

If he remembered correctly, they were a race who possessed a significant amount of mana within the gem planted in their forehead. Such a characteristic made them a target of sorcerers, and their entire race was supposed to have perished long ago. Shax was at a complete loss as to why a race that was barely recounted in legends appeared before him. There was also no guessing as to why it was targeting him.

Well, I guess I do have one clue as to why...

Rare species hunt... the abominable incident that occurred five years ago. If this was a survivor from that time, it wasn't all that strange for them to bear a grudge against him. This did just happen moments after Barbatos thrust that incident before him, after all.

Shax shifted his attention to the cat in his arms. Even without its eyesight, it surely noticed the abnormality around them. All its fur was standing on end, and it was trembling violently. It was entirely possible that the cat was threatening Shax, though.

“Sorry Blacky. I got you caught up in something troublesome here.”

There were only two exits from this room, the window and the path into the church. The intruder came in from the window, so the only escape route was the door.

Which is perfectly clear to them too, huh?

Shax began shuffled toward the door, and the carbuncle inched toward it as if to block him. And even as he was being cornered, Shax wove together some simple sorcery in his hand. Just as his preparations were complete, he let out a shout and broke into a dash.

“Uwaaaaaaaaah!”

The carbuncle followed suit and rushed in. To get away, Shax would have to twist the door knob and pull the door open. Conversely, the carbuncle only needed to slam in at full speed. This naturally created a difference in speed, and the carbuncle was the first to reach the door.

“Waaah! Just let me go...! Kidding.”

It was completely natural for someone's attention to reflexively concentrate on another wailing and screaming about. This applied even more so when the one doing so was a formidable enemy. The carbuncle twisted its head and focused on Shax as he then thrust out his palm.

“O Light!”

“Mgh?!”

His sorcery only created light; it didn't have even an ounce of offensive power behind it. Originally, all it did was create a light

source that would only really be useful when reading at night in the dark. Shax used this with one hand when doing delicate medical procedures that required illumination.

Shax modified the sorcery a little to create a light as bright as the sun for but an instant. It was pretty worthless sorcery overall, but the carbuncle turned its head right into it and let out a scream as its eyes were rendered useless.

And without paying any mind to the writhing carbuncle, Shax headed toward the window. The intruder seemed to be a sorcerer. They would recover in but a few seconds. All he did was equivalent to creating a sudden bright light in the darkness, after all.

Shax cradled the black cat to protect it from the fragments of glass as he jumped out the window. And after taking some distance, he put the cat down on the ground.

“See ya, Blacky. Get picked up by someone more upstanding next time, okay?”

This was the church. If an Angelic Knight or priest found the cat, they would surely take them in. He felt like the black cat looked up at him in surprise, but Shax already started running away.

“Come on! This way you idiot! Don’t get all caught up by some kid’s trick you moron!”

And even as he laughed at himself for going so far for some stray cat, Shax taunted the carbuncle.

All I need to do now is run all the way to the boss, huh?

Even if he wasn’t all that strong, Shax was still a wily sorcerer who had managed to survive until now. He would show that he could run away. And as he continued to rile up the carbuncle, his face spasmed in the next instant. For some reason, the carbuncle wasn’t running toward Shax, but toward the black cat.

Why...? He’s targeting Blacky...?

The carbuncle bulldozed through a wall and lunged toward the cat. Since he had distanced himself from the cat to let it get away, he was now too far away to intervene.

“Blacky!”

And just as he stretched out his arm and screamed...

Shax saw it.

A pitch black something was squirming about at the carbuncle’s feet.

“Gah...!”

The leaping carbuncle came to a complete stop in midair. And taking a look at it now, Shax could see bulky chains wrapped around its arm. And the chains were coming out of ‘something’ from the shadow at its feet.

The sound of grinding metal filled the air as more chains shot out

of the shadow. There wasn't just one or two, but dozens upon dozens of chains wrapping around the carbuncle's arms, feet, face and waist as they constricted it as if to pull it into the shadow.

What the hell is that? Barbatos?

It was similar to his sorcery in that it was an attack that came from the shadows with no warning, but it felt entirely different from sorcery, like it was something far more terrifying. Shax froze in bewilderment at the sight for a few seconds.

"Meow."

And with the black cat's meow, he came back to his senses.

"We're getting out of here Blacky!"

He had no idea what those chains were or who was responsible for them, but his priority right now was the cat. Shax scooped it up and dashed away like a startled hare to get as far away as he could.

Was that carbuncle just now really aiming for Blacky?

It was impossible, but all he could do for now was run. And as he ran without even taking a glance back, he had no way of noticing.

Something had crawled out of the shadows along with the chains, and had buried its fangs into the carbuncle's neck.



"Haha, sorry about that you guys. You're Zagan's companions, right? Actually, he already got himself a girl? What a sinful little boy he is."

Stella let out a hearty laugh as she knocked back some ale. Just like when they last saw her, she had crimson hair and a crimson eye. Her other eye was silver, and could be peeked at through her bangs hanging over it.

Is that the artificial eye from back then... I wonder?

It was a cursed artificial eye that even Archdemon Andrealphus was unable to suppress. If that was being used once more, then it was a situation that they should be wary of, but seeing this girl laugh so purely, they couldn't sense any of the evil from her that they could before.

Chastille and Nephtheros were watching over her attentively, not sure how they should be treating her. The little girl Stella brought along was chewing at some bread next to her timidly. And after Nephth took a small breath, she calmed herself down and went on to question Stella.

"Um, has your body recovered now?"

"Body...? Oh, yeah. You were all there at that time too, huh? Well, my wounds are all gone thanks to my teacher, but..."

Nephth tilted her head at the somewhat evasive answer, as Stella then hesitated to continue.

"In truth... I don't really remember much about what happened.

Rather, I don't remember anything that happened after my teacher picked me up."

"Is that so..."

Stella then suddenly raised her voice.

"Oh, I remember now!"

"Wh-What about?"

"Yeah. I remember meeting you." She then shyly averted her gaze before continuing. "Zagan really spoke fondly of you. It was like he was talking about his most precious treasure."

The little girl dropped her bread, and Nephy covered her face.

"Master Zagan... that's embarrassing..."

"...You know you're smiling, right?" Nephteros quipped.



“Auu...”

And with her sister joining in, Nephy was brought down to her knees, leaving Stella with a strained smile.

“Haha... I’m glad it looks like you get along so well. So how are the other two here related?”

Nephteros and Chastille exchanged glances. Now that they thought of it, they were a little too shaken and had yet to properly introduce themselves.

“I’m Nephteros. Nephelia is my sister. Big... Zagan also treats me as his sister-in-law.”

“Oh, you two do look like peas in a pod... hang on, what? The sister of his lover is his sister-in-law means... you two are already married?”

“Are you, Nephelia?”

With the attention turned back on her, Nephy was on the verge of passing out.

“Um... um...”

“Well, I guess he wouldn’t do that kind of thing, huh? Nephy and Zagan just have their own way of getting along is all.” Chastille brought that conversation to an end for Nephy, then introduced herself. “My name is Chastille. How do I even explain it? I hold the title of a bishop, and have become responsible for the church in this town. Zagan is... a sworn ally... would be about the right way to put it? Anyway, we have a friendly relationship.”

“Hmmm? I thought the church treated sorcerers as their enemies. Has that changed?”

“Well, even the church happens to have all sorts of factions. I don’t intend on causing you any harm either, so I’d like for you to feel at ease.”

Stella nodded back to Chastille in admiration.

“That so? I see Zagan has made some proper friends, huh? That boy has always been rather bad at socializing. Even when he tried thanking people, he always glared at them for a long time so everyone just ran away. His big sister here really was worried about it...”

Seeing that she really was moved to tears, it appeared that Zagan’s difficult to understand personality stemmed all the ways to his days before he was a sorcerer. And seeing her like that, the little girl squeezed on Stella’s hand.

“It’s okay. The Archdemon isn’t scary. He’s actually really nice.”

“...Thanks. You’re such a good girl Lisette.”

It seemed the little girl’s name was Lisette.

“And how are the two of you related?” Chastille asked.

“Hmmm. Sisters maybe? She was being attacked by something

weird so I picked her up.”

Stella brushed back her bangs and looked around the area with her right eye.

“I could see those weird things here and there up until now, but apparently they’re gone. Maybe they ran away? Or are targeting someone else? Or maybe they were hunted down by someone? Anyway, it looks like things have calmed down, so I thought I’d give her something to eat and came here.”

It appeared that her artificial eye was assisting her, unlike the one she used as Decarabia. At the very least, she didn’t show any signs of going berserk right now.

“Hey, can I ask about your circumstances too maybe? There’s no way you guys are struggling for money since Zagan’s an Archdemon now, right? And you’re a bishop too. So why are you working here?” Stella asked.

Chastille and Nephteros looked over to Nephy, who was the reason they were working.

I feel like it will be fine to tell her.

Nephy nodded, then finally stood back up to her feet.

“Actually—”

“A present for Zagan?”

Stella stared back at her in wonder, and Nephy nodded.

“Yes. I’ve heard that today is a festival called Alshire Imera, and there’s a custom to present gifts to the one you hold dearest. That’s why I wanted to try earning money on my own so that I could buy a present.”

She also thought of making something on her own, but she had already given him a handmade muffler before. Moreover, there were many things that were difficult to procure if she were to make something by hand in the middle of the night.

It would be difficult to make ‘that’ by hand too.

Nephy had a good idea of what she wanted to give him as a present already. And upon hearing her answer, Stella clapped her hands together energetically.

“Okay! In that case I’ll help out too.”

“Is that alright?”

“Mm. I don’t really remember it clearly, but the last time I met Zagan I feel like I did something really bad to him. So this’ll be like making amends for that.” She then grinned and pointed at Nephy. “Besides, I’m awfully interested in just what kind of girl Zagan fell in love with.”

“Auu...” Nephy winced, unable to see any future where she wasn’t going to be teased by this girl.

Nephteros, who had been quiet until now, then suddenly cut into

the conversation.

“It’s fine to help and all, but why did you come to this town in the first place? The personal disciple of an Archdemon couldn’t possibly have come to do some sightseeing, right?”

“Hmmm, not entirely. Honestly, I’m completely at a dead end.”

“What do you mean?”

Stella smiled back in a troubled manner.

“I’m looking for Marc. I mean, Zagan’s looking for him too it seems.”

Nephy also knew that Zagan was searching for that man.

“Do you have any leads?” Nephy asked.

“About the only thing I know is where he was trying to go after I last met him.”

“C-Could you tell me where he was going?”

Even Nephteros and Chastille joined Nephy in leaning forward in anticipation. However, Stella’s expression clouded over.

“Marc was chasing a sorcerer named Shere Khan... one of the thirteen Archdemons.”

Nephy was left at a complete loss for words at such an unpredictable answer.



“Keehee, this shop has everything from clothes to accessories targeted at girls, you know? They surely have something fit for a gift for Lady Nephy.”

They were currently in a general store a short distance from Kianoides’ shopping district. There was a need for the store to be some distance away from other stores so it was off the main street. If one did not know it was there, then they surely wouldn’t visit it. It was a hole in the wall that was well known to those who knew of it. The interior of the store was quite vast, but the shelves were cram packed and there were quite a lot of customers, giving it a claustrophobic impression. Such was the case, but upon seeing everything collected here, Zagan nodded in a convinced manner.

“I see, looks like I’ll be able to find what I’m looking for here. You have my thanks.”

“I am love blessed to be given such honest praise.”

“I don’t get it, but whatever. This helps. Honestly, the only option I could think of on my own was visiting Manuela’s shop.”

Gremory let out a sigh of relief.

Precisely why I had to guide you here!

Gremory knew that Foll was planning a party for Alshiere Imera, and also knew that Nephy was working at a tavern so that she could buy Zagan a present. Gremory’s mission was to make sure their surprises succeeded without Zagan catching on. There was a pretty

high probability that Nephy would head toward Manuela's shop, so she guided him to a special store instead.

Just imagining his reaction when the surprise succeeds with a bang... ugh, crap, I feel a nosebleed coming.

Setting aside Gremory getting all aroused on her own, Zagan began looking through the goods on sale... For the time being, all the other customers around him were women, but the Archdemon showed no signs of cowardice. More precisely, he even had a shopping basket hanging down from his arm and was completely blending in. It was entirely possible that he simply didn't recognize the other sex at all as long as they weren't Nephy. Well, if he wasn't at least that hardy, Gremory wouldn't look up to him as her lord. After coming back to her senses, Gremory looked to Zagan and found him staring at some sort of long and narrow tube with a groan.

"It's not bad... no, we really don't need this."

It didn't look like a present for Nephy, but Zagan returned it to its shelf in a troubled manner. Gremory then took a peek into Zagan's shopping basket. He had what looked like pendants, mufflers, hats and all sort of similar goods thrown into it.

"Hrm? My liege. Is this not too much for a gift for Lady Nephy?"

"I'm just jamming anything in that comes to mind. I've yet to actually pick something for Nephy."

Gremory continued to stare at the basket in curiosity for a while longer, but then came to a realization.

"My liege. Are these perhaps for your subordinates?"

"No, sorcerers won't be happy at getting such normal ornaments. There's Foll, Lilith, Selphy, Nephteros and also Raphael... Aah, I'll at least prepare something for you and Kimaris too."

"Huaah?"

Gremory never expected things to go in this direction and let out a strange sound.

I only informed him that there was a custom to give a present to one's lover, right? Has the Alshire Imera party been found out?

Upon thinking that, Gremory immediately realized that wasn't the case. This man was surely just thinking that if he gave Nephy a present, he would make Foll feel lonely if he didn't get her something too. And if he were to prepare something for Foll, then Raphael, Lilith and Selphy required presents as well. This went on to even include herself and Kimaris. He truly was an un-Archdemon-like sorcerer.

No, that is precisely what makes him my king, right?

This man was fulfilling Gremory's desire to 'love all creation,' and just perhaps, he would help her with that other matter too. And suddenly, Gremory took a look at her surroundings.

"Something wrong?"

“No, I just thought that damn Kimaris was strangely panicked today.”

Gremory replied to Zagan with a puzzled expression of her own. Under normal circumstances, he would chase after her even if she leaped into mud to erase her scent. And with that, Zagan glared back at her reproachfully.

“What? You planning on buying that for Kimaris?”

Gremory was brought back to reality in an instant.

“Eeep? I-I’m not! Why would I do something like that for...”

“You’re not? I think you should sympathize with Kimaris at least once in a while.”

“Mrrr...”

Gremory groaned. This Archdemon was sensitive to the subtleties of the emotions of others despite being a late bloomer himself. Well, the fact that he knew these things but wasn’t able to do it well himself just made it that much more worth watching his love, though.

Gremory then picked up the pendant.

I wonder if he would actually be happy...

She did think it would suit him, but just how would he take it? Gremory’s relationship with Kimaris was just about half a century long, but that was also what made it difficult to become intimate with him. If pushed to say it, she was inseparable from him.

“If my liege orders it, then I must obey.”

“You’re quite the pain in the ass sometimes, you know...?”

She felt like Zagan was exasperated with her in an entirely different way from usual, but today was Alshire Imera. She wouldn’t incur any punishment from just being a little whimsical.

Gremory went ahead to settle her own bill ahead of Zagan, and just then...

“So there’s a shop here? I never noticed.”

An elf with pure white hair stepped into the store.

Gaaaaah! L-L-L-L-L-Lady Nephy?! Why here?!

“Eeek? Um, miss?”

Gremory quickly vaulted over the counter and hid herself, but she was completely thrown out of sorts. The clerk called out to her in surprise, but Gremory had no leisure to pay that any mind. That was but a trifle compared to the calamity that was about to occur.

“I wonder if Big Bro will be surprised by this outfit?”

“I’m sure Zagan will praise you and be happy about it... But, there’s no point in making me wear this outfit too, right?”

And it wasn’t just Nephy, Nephteros and Chastille were with her. The three of them also seemed to have come by still wearing the uniforms they had on for work. It was a charming red and white costume.

“You were just saying that it wasn’t embarrassing, weren’t you?”
Nephteros quipped with a laugh.

“Being seen by people I know is an entirely different matter.”

“Isn’t it fine? They said it was a surprise, right? I think there’s a bigger impact if we all do it together.”

“Geez... guess there’s no other choice. It’d be nice if Barbatos doesn’t see this, though.”

For some reason, Nephteros was teasing her in good humor, and Chastille was giving in without resistance.

Crap... this is bad. My liege mustn't see this!

The girls were preparing an even greater surprise that Gremory knew nothing about. Having it exposed here wasn’t something that Gremory could possibly allow as an evangelist of love power. And as if bringing the finishing blow to Gremory, who was trembling from her fear and her sense of duty, the next person came into sight.

“Haha. Isn’t it a great shop? Back in the day, I would come and ogle at this stuff all day long as a way of distracting me from starvation. There’s a whole lotta cute stuff here, right?”

She had long bangs covering her right eye, but there was no way Gremory would mistake her for someone else. This was Zagan’s old friend, the girl called Stella who they parted with half a month ago on the uninhabited island near Liucaon.

Decarabia...! Or was it Stella now? Why is she in town too?!

The girl’s tough past left Nephteros and Chastille completely taken aback.

“Well, you are his big sister, so that’s about how it would be, huh...?”

“Once in a while, I truly wonder whether the church is actually saving the people. I’m anxious if we’re really useful at all here...”

Stella laughed in a troubled manner.

“Well, we had good times too, you know? More importantly, I wonder if we can find anything fitting for Zagan’s present here? I actually brought you all along to look for Marc, though.”

“It’s alright, Miss Stella. Master Zagan has always been worried about your safety. He will surely be pleased to be able to meet you.”

“Is that so? Well, okay, then,” Stella said as she awkwardly scratched her face before continuing, “Right on! Leave it to Big Sis! Let’s do our best to make it a wonderful surprise!”

“Right!”

Gremory was left screaming in her mind from under the counter.

The surprise is about to get spooooooooooooiled!!

The girls didn’t know that the one they were trying to surprise was but a few steps away. Perhaps as a small mercy, Zagan was at a shelf in a blind spot from the entrance. So neither he nor the girls had

yet to notice each other. However, just how was Gremory supposed to avert the oncoming crisis when the exit to the building was blocked as it was? She didn't even feel this cornered one month ago when she escaped from her teacher just for the chance to love strike the girls of Liucaon.

Gremory quietly took a deep breath.

It seems the time to cast this life away may have come.

She made her resolve, hardened her spirit and abandoned her fear. No matter how impossible, no matter how difficult, she had to do it. There was no other choice. It must be done.

Love power is found even in death!

All was for the sake of realizing the delighted expressions of those lovely girls in that one instant. Even if she herself were not there to witness it, it had to be accomplished.

"Um, miss? Are you not feeling well? Would you like me to call a doctor?"

The reckoning was at hand. And yet, the clerk called out to her in concern as Gremory began writhing about under the counter. And in response, Gremory transformed into a beautiful woman and sat atop the counter. She then suddenly lifted the clerk's chin with her finger.

"Keehee, fret not. You are simply so adorable that I had a dizzy spell."

"Huh? Huh? Um? Auu...?"

It wasn't like the clerk had any such inclinations, but the fomorian's full power could even charm the same sex. This was the power of Balor's Evil Eye that belonged to the fomorians, who called themselves the ancestors of the succubae.

This is a gamble!

Gremory's eccentric behavior should have been easily seen by both Zagan and Nephy. In this case, they would surely take action to stop her. The problem was who would cut in first. And the winner was...

"Are you unable to be obedient for even a few minutes?!"

Zagan. He brought down his fist atop her head, and sparks flew about in Gremory's vision.

But... this... is good... I won... the bet?

The counter was designed to face the exit, so with Zagan on the other side smacking Gremory atop the head, his back was turned to Nephy's group.

"M-Master Zagan?!" Nephy whispered with a jolt.

"Shh! Let's run Nephelia!" Nephteros shushed her and took her hand.

"Awawawawa!" Chastille began panicking.

"You run too! Zagan will find us!" Stella grabbed her and ran.

The moment Gremory's consciousness faded, she saw with her very own eyes that Nephy's group had safely escaped.



"I really must apologize for my subordinate."

"Oh, no. It was not her... please, do not pay it any mind."

Zagan bobbed his head down to the clerk and finished settling his payment. The girl was on the verge of fainting from having an Archdemon bow down to her, but Zagan had no time to worry about that.

I wonder if Orias is like this too...

That Archdemon apologized on every occasion that he met her. Was she too just like Zagan as he was now? Filled to the brim with apologies for this idiot's behavior? The person in question was lying there with an accomplished-looking face too, so he couldn't help but feel irritated about it.

It's even worse that I can't hate her for it.

She was talented enough for him to have her as his left hand, and her habitual behavior never resulted in something worse than this. His head hurt, and he didn't want to get involved any further, but she wasn't someone he felt enough disgust for that he would push her away. And since it couldn't be helped, he paid for Gremory as well, and then dragged her along by the scruff of her neck.

"How long do you plan on sleeping? We have to go check on Kuroka next. Hurry up. We won't be able to return to the castle until nighttime at this rate."

Zagan left the store with his baggage in his right hand and Gremory in his left, as he sensed a somewhat relieved presence behind him.

"We somehow got by without him finding us."

"Miss Gremory... I shall definitely repay this kindness...!"

And just as Zagan was about to turn around upon hearing a familiar voice.

"Mister Zagan?"

A familiar looking girl came running over.

"Kuu?"

It was the vulpin Kuu. Judging from her maid outfit which was similar to the one Nephy usually wore, he could tell that she was in the middle of her job at Manuela's shop. Zagan only knew her for a short while when he looked after her for a bit, but Kuu came running over and clung to him nonetheless.

"Please help. Kuroka, Kuroka..."

"What happened?"

Immediately sensing something abnormal had happened, Zagan squat down and lined his sight up with Kuu's as he questioned her

with a serious look. At the same time, he dropped Gremory, who woke up when the back of her head slammed into the ground.

“Owowowow... My liege... could you be just a little kinder to me...? Hrm? What’s going on here?”

Even as she tumbled over head over heels on the ground, Gremory’s expression turned grim. Setting aside her usual eccentric behavior, Kuu now had two of what could be considered the most reliable sorcerers in town earnestly lending her their ears. After taking a short moment to collect herself, she began her tale.

“Kuroka vanished. She was supposed to do a reading of the scriptures at the orphanage, but they said she never showed up. She even said that we would celebrate when she got back.”

The scene reminded Zagan of the time Kuroka was running about looking for Kuu. The situation was completely reversed, but at that time, Kuu was being manipulated by Archdemon Bifrons, and was left with ghastly memories.

I don't think Bifrons could possibly be involved here...

Bifrons would surely antagonize him again one day, but the covenant he etched into the Archdemon wasn’t so simple that it could be broken in one or two months.

“What do I do...? Kuroka is unfortunate to begin with, so if she gets caught up in something bad...”

Kuu was doing her best to put on a brave front, but she had tears running down her cheeks. Gremory then stole a glance over to Zagan.

“My liege. Wouldn’t you be able to search for Lady Kuroka with your barrier?”

This town was Zagan’s domain. It was outfitted with the capability of finding almost anybody within it.

I mean, I was troubled by not being able to find Kuu when she was abducted last time.

To repent for that, he put up a barrier around the town. Having said that, there were tens of thousands of people in town. Counting everything that moved put the number in the hundreds of thousands. The problem was how to sift through that massive amount of information.

In Zagan’s case, he was capable of using the wavelength of mana peculiar to an individual to search for them and pinpoint where they were in town. He was incapable of recognizing those who had no mana flowing through them, and was incapable of distinguishing the mana of anyone but his target. However, he also had the advantage of being able to search memories of the past. Such was the case, but Zagan grimaced.

“I’ve already been trying...”

And he still couldn’t find her.

What's going on? Did she leave town? No, her presence vanished completely right at a certain point.

The halt of the flow of mana could be connected to death, but it didn't vanish in that way. It was like it became a blur and vanished in an instant. It was as if she was abducted by Barbatos' shadow or something and disappeared.

Barbatos is actually better at this kind of thing...

Barbatos' sorcery to traverse through the shadows also used wavelengths of mana as landmarks. He was more of an expert in that type of sorcery than Zagan was. Barbatos would be capable of easily understanding information that Zagan was unable to pick up on. Having said that, he couldn't rely on someone who wasn't...

"Oof... dammit, why do I gotta look for that stupid cat lady, anyway? Don't fuck with me."

For some reason or other, Barbatos showed up, apparently driven out of the shop they were just in.

"Barbatos?"

"Purgatory?"

Zagan and Gremory both raised their voices in surprise. Kuu didn't know him, so she ran behind Zagan with a slightly frightened look on her face.

"Why the hell are you here?" Zagan inquired.

"Haa? That's cause the crybaby... never mind, it's nothing. I'm just passing by. I don't got any other reason to be here. None at all."

Barbatos was even wiping a cold sweat from his brow as he replied with his awareness focused entirely behind him.

Did Chastille also come to that store?

Well, she did in fact live in this town, so it wasn't all that strange to coincidentally end up at the same location. He was somewhat curious as to why she wasn't showing herself if that were the case, though...

It was also bizarre that Barbatos looked to be driven out of the shop, despite being unparalleled in not listening to others.

Is it something Alshire Imera related again?

If that was the case, it may have been wiser for Zagan not to pry. It was difficult for him to claim that he was protecting his promise with Kimaris just by the fact that he was looking for a present for Nephy and the others already. He didn't need to complicate it further. Moreover, Zagan wasn't particularly bothered by Barbatos being driven out of a shop. And since there was no other choice here, Zagan went along with it.

"Hmph. I have no interest in what you're doing here. Setting that aside, lend me a hand. I've got information here I'm not able to parse myself."

“Huh? You can’t possibly be asking me to work pro bono, could you?”

“...Isn’t it more convenient for you if I don’t pry further here?”

“Erk...”

Barbatos’ face expressed both hatred and grief, as if he was swindled out of a bet he had placed all his money on. He then groaned like he despaired for everything in the world.

“...So? What do you want?”

“I lost trace of Kuroka’s tracks halfway. I don’t care if you use my barrier. Find her.”

“Yeah yeah...”

Zagan handed over control of the barrier, and Barbatos knit his brows.

“Hm? That really is a weird way to disappear. It don’t really feel like she died... more like the nature of her mana itself changed or something?”

Kuu jolted at the mention of death, but looked relieved upon figuring out that it wasn’t necessarily the case. After glancing at her for a moment, Gremory inquired for more details.

“By a change in nature, do you mean in the same way mine changes when I manipulate my age?”

“Well, it’s kinda like that. Though I’d say it’s a bit different.”

A person’s features and physique would change along with their growth. Mana followed a similar course. When one grew older, the wavelength and nature of their mana would change little by little. It didn’t change much in one or two years, but going from a young girl to and old woman like Gremory did, it could be said to be impossible to track her by mana. That was precisely how she managed to shake off Archdemon Orias during the incident one month ago.

Oh come on. Please don’t tell me it’s Kuroka’s turn to turn into a kid now.

The memories of turning into a child still haunted Zagan’s dreams to this day. There were in fact other ways of changing the nature of one’s mana at least. For example, she could be restrained in a way that not even an iota of her mana was being emitted.

Barbatos continued to manipulate the barrier, and smiled as if he found something.

“Oh? Looks like there’s a guy coming out from where the cat lady vanished ain’t there now?”

“So, did he kidnap her?”

“Who knows? But looks like something happened. Why did that guy go somewhere like that, anyway?”

“Someone you know?” Zagan asked, scowling at Barbatos.

“He’s more someone you know. You remember a guy called

Shax?”

Zagan’s eyes shot wide open upon hearing an unexpected name.

“He’s the subordinate that I stationed at the church.”

He was a sorcerer who specialized in healing sorcery. Real healing sorcery wasn’t anything like the shoddy techniques Zagan employed himself. It used blades that could sever the affected region without injuring the skin, threads of mana which could even suture nerves back together, and could even suspend a patient’s metabolism putting them in a comatose state for more complicated procedures. It used many highly advanced techniques and magic circles.

“I don’t understand what’s going on, but if he’s involved, we just have to question him. Open a shadow.”

“Haa... What an unlucky day. I didn’t even do anything bad today, why do I gotta do all this volunteer crap...”

He did in fact swipe Shax’s drink earlier and started up all sorts of trouble, but Barbatos himself didn’t really recognize any of that as something bad.

“Right, whatever... Oh? Looks like that asshole’s really on the move. I’ll send you over, but it ain’t my fault if you lose him, got it?”

“Whatever, just make it quick.”

Barbatos grumbled and opened the shadow, sending Zagan over to the other side. And what greeted him, was a fiendish looking claw coming right down at him. It really gave him a sense of déjà vu. Back during the incident with Kuroka and Kuu, he also had a sword coming at him right upon teleporting.

Tch! This is why I hate his stupid shadows!

The only difference was that the claws came to a stop on their own without Zagan having to do anything.

“Sir Zagan?”

It was the giant sorcerer with the face of a lion.

“Kimaris? Why are you here...?”

And the man and the black cat slipped by as if weaving through the complex threads of fate. However, the cogs that should have missed each other were set in motion and were now engaged.

Chapter IV: On a Sacred Night, a Vampire Prays for Miracles and a Black Cat Brings Good Luck

The sound of a wheel quietly creaking rang out in complete darkness. It was a wheelchair. This apparatus was controlled with sorcery and could be moved without its user lifting a single finger. In other words, it moved only by their thoughts. And sitting within it was a therianthrope sorcerer.

They looked like a lion, but possessed no mane, and the white fur which covered their entire body had what looked like black streaks of lightning running across it. It was a characteristic of the cryptids known as tigers.

Lions were called the king of all beasts, while tigers were called man eating devils and monsters. They didn't exist in the world naturally. They were summoned or created by sorcerers, understood human language, and possessed a tremendous amount of mana. They were the king of monsters.

The Sigil of the Archdemon appeared on the tiger's right hand. This sorcerer's second name was the Tiger King, but his body had atrophied so much that he was just skin and bones. He was paralyzed. If not for the help of a servant, he couldn't even have a meal or defecate on his own.

Even the flow of his mana was completely pulverized. His body was beyond hope as both a normal person and as a sorcerer.

And the one to destroy this famed Archdemon and render him to such a state was a single young man.

That detestable Seraph Hunter...

There was a direct correlation between a sorcerer's strength and the accumulation of their knowledge. An Archdemon who lived hundreds of years could be said to possess power far beyond human understanding.

The Tiger King was a sorcerer who concentrated on accumulating knowledge for the purpose of battle. It was said that he ranked just barely behind Andrealphus among all Archdemons, and even surpassed the aging Eldest. And that young man pulverized the Tiger King in a confrontation straight from the front all on his own.

It was... terrifying...

It was a power that could destroy the world. Something that shouldn't exist. And as he trembled, the sorcerer's lips warped into a smile.

"No... that... which shouldn't... exist... also... applies... to me..."

However, despite being resolved for everything, this was the state he was reduced to. He carried out his desires knowing full well that he would be rendered so utterly pathetic. No matter what punishment he would suffer, regardless of the millions of grudges he would build, he decided to push forward to grant that one desire that could never be forgiven.

Having his body pulverized beyond repair was nothing to him. That terrifying young man was no longer around. The curse he cast on the man in exchange for the blow suffered to his body would finally have defeated him in the past five years.

That's why he once more took action. The preparations took a tremendous amount of labor and pain. His body was in a state where it took an enormous amount of effort to breathe, let alone cast sorcery. If it was known that he had survived all this time, he would have been immediately disposed of. That's why he couldn't seek help from others.

Nevertheless, he continued his unsightly struggle for survival, gave birth to a familiar who could move for him, raised it so it could use the most basic of sorcery, and secretly made his preparations.

He knew full well that if he tried to accomplish his desire, even someone other than that young Seraph Hunter would stand in his way. He knew full well that even if his desire was fulfilled and his body were to never recover, they would never allow it to pass.

"Just... a little more..."

A little more, and all the necessary pieces would be in place. There was just one more piece, the last fragment which led to the Silver-Eyed King. His eyes had long lost their light, but the image of a single girl appeared before them.

She wore a dress the shade of the night and had eyes colored like the moon. She carried a creepy stuffed doll and appeared quite young, but was an ancient being. She was the first undead, the Saint of the Night, Alshiera. She protected the Holy Treasures of Liucaon, and would never take center stage. And now, she was finally out in the open.

If he could take hold of her, his desire would finally be fulfilled. He failed the first time. However, there was none left to protect her now.

His cloudy eyes reflected nothing. This sorcerer who looked dead despite being alive could no longer see the present. Everything he saw was a deep-rooted delusion. As such, even if the world were to be

destroyed, it meant nothing to him.



Going back to a little after Shax was attacked in his room at the church.

He was running. His form was not that of a human, but a beast running on all fours. Every step he took gave birth to a violent gale. The wind loaded with mana could trample all before it like a wheel running over straw. As the black gale died down, blood went flying everywhere, but not a single drop stained his body.

Looking at the spectacle he had created, his memories from before becoming a sorcerer came to mind. He was ignorant, young, foolish, a beast who only moved according to his emotions. He had no composure, and killed and devoured all that caught his eye. And what appeared before that young beast was a single witch.

“You sure have made a bloody mess of my domain. Come now, I shall bestow you a reward, so be grateful and accept it.”

He didn’t remember much of what happened after that. He could certainly remember that the witch rushed in to attack him, but before he knew it, he was sprawled across the ground. And above him, was the witch, looking down at him, covered in a spurt of his blood.

“I’ve changed my mind, oh foolish monster. I shall keep your pitiful self as a pet.”

He tried to snap at her, but his body wouldn’t move. He could only groan.

“Keeheehee. So you still have the energy to rebel? It looks like it will be well worth training you. But it’s useless. The only one who hasn’t moved unto my will up until now is my teacher. Now that I have my eyes on you, you can no longer escape.”

And following that, the witch began to train him. She gave the nameless monster a name of his own, taught him to speak, fed him, granted him clothes and passed to him the dignity of a person.

The witch’s name was Enchantress Gremory.

And the name she bestowed on the beast was Kimaris.

I wonder if Miss Gremory is supporting Sir Zagan because he is similar to her?

Zagan himself would surely deny it whole heartedly, but the two of them were fundamentally similar to Kimaris’ nose. If he were to point out a difference between them, it would be that Zagan was honest in displaying his feelings whereas Gremory had a tendency to aggravate the situation by hiding her embarrassment.

The ‘scent’ that the two of them gave off was comforting. That’s why Kimaris ran and ran, for the sake of one who bore a similar scent to the two of them. And that person in question was...

“Miss Alshiera! Are you unharmed?!”

The vampire Alshiera that Zagan so detested.

Alshiera was seated atop a corpse. It had a crimson jewel in its forehead, a carbuncle. It looked to be dead already, but it had two fang marks on its neck. There was apparently a battle, but Alshiera showed no signs of injury. The childish vampire wiped her mouth with a pure white handkerchief as she let out a sigh.



"I finally thought I caught up, but they managed to run away once more."

The one she was chasing was Zagan's subordinate Shax, and the black cat that he happened to be carrying. She then took a dispirited look down at herself.

"I don't intend to make myself look all that terrifying here..."

She was apparently a little hurt by that. Kimaris read the atmosphere and didn't prod any further. He instead changed to his human form and bent a knee.

"My apologies. If I was just a little faster in getting here..."

"Oh my, how scary. So you say you're too slow when you massacred near one hundred enemies in but an instant?"

She was smiling casually, but Kimaris could tell from her scent that she was getting impatient.

"They are overflowing even in the middle of town. This is clearly abnormal considering they are within Sir Zagan's barrier."

I wonder if it's related to today being Alshiere Imera...

Alshiere Imera was a day of festivities, but it was also a day with a deep connection to death. It wasn't all that unlikely for sorcery to be found there.

"Well, that cannot really be helped. In a manner of speaking, they are similar to lizards. Even when the tail is torn off, a new one will grow out immediately."

Just as she finished mentioning it, a new shadow began crawling out of the corpse Alshiera was seated atop. And perhaps not having noticed it, she simply continued casually talking to Kimaris.

"So honestly speaking, you're quite the big help, you know? As I am now, the most I can do is change my form and swing around my little doll like this. I'm but a frail little girl."

Alshiera swung the creepy stuffed doll in her left hand directly behind her. A dull sound rang out, and the shadow struck by it was slammed into the wall of the church before one could even verify what it was, where it ceased moving.

Even Miss Gremory would be a 'frail little girl' compared to this person...

She herself claimed to have lost the majority of her power, but even so, she was tremendously strong when compared to the run of the mill sorcerer.

Alshiera then let out a chuckle.

"In any case, you sure are a whimsical one, aren't you? You know full well that your lord shuns me do you not? And yet here you are helping me."

"I told you already, that is a different matter from my desire to

help you.”

Shortly after parting with Zagan, Kimaris happened upon this girl in an alley. He had heard about her from Zagan before, and even considered eliminating her if she proved to be dangerous. However, when he actually met her, he found that she was wounded, cornered and exhausted in an attempt to help Zagan.

She hid it using her stuffed doll, her gestures and her arm, but her left side looked to be damp as if it were bleeding. It was a wound severe enough that even a member of the Night Clan couldn't heal it. It didn't seem to be all that old a wound, but it also wasn't something she had received in the last few days either. Even now, Alshiera's existence was waning more and more.

She must not... have long left...

And even so, she came all the way here just to accomplish something. That was more than enough reason for Kimaris to be touched by her actions.

He then looked over to the dead carbuncle.

“So what exactly are these people? They seem to be undead, but they are clearly different from the Night Clan. They don't seem to possess an ego.”

They didn't seem like an existence capable of dealing a severe wound to Alshiera no matter how many of them attacked her. They also didn't seem to possess enough intelligence to track her when she was capable of transforming her body into mist or bats.

Which must mean that something else was responsible for Miss Alshiera's wound.

Alshiera languidly cast her gaze to the floor.

“You would be... correct. I suppose you could say that they're complete failures who can't even compare to vampires, zombies, or even skeletons.”

“Which means these are beings who failed to become undead?”

“That's not quite right. They are more like failed puppets that were created in the process of trying to create a true undead. They are but empty vessels which imitate their forms from the olden days. There is something else out there who created and manipulates them.”

“In other words, the caster is trying to make up for such faults by using Miss Kuroka and yourself?”

Kimaris had never met Kuroka himself, but he was informed that she had become a cat and was being targeted. The only ones who were aware of this fact were, in all likelihood, Kimaris and Alshiera.

Alshiera didn't appear to have any intentions of hiding this fact and honestly nodded back.

“The caster probably believes so.” She then tightly embraced her creepy stuffed doll in regret. “Most species that are considered rare

have inherited a certain person's blood. They believe that by collecting such a factor will allow them to bring back the true undead."

"Bring back? It existed before?"

But the girl shook her head.

"Such a thing never existed. However, the sentiments of man overthrow the providence of the world from time to time."

"It's true that man often attempts to accomplish things far beyond their own power, but is this the same thing?"

Kimaris looked for confirmation, yet Alshiera shook her head again.

"Such things lie outside the providence of the world. You could even say that they change the very fabric of the world. Such power was called sorcery by sorcerers, mysticism by high elves, and miracles by the church."

Kimaris doubted his own ears.

"Are you saying those three are all the same?"

Sorcery, mysticism, and miracles, which likely referred to the Sacred Swords, all had different structures and different driving forces. They were all powers completely within their own categorizations. But, Alshiera shook her head.

"The manifestation of power itself is surely all different. Nevertheless, the source which gave birth to all of them is the same."

"And that's... the sentiments of man?"

"Yes. Be it anger. Be it prayer. Or perhaps even despair. The commonality is that they possessed a will strong enough to change the very world."

Her explanation already surpassed Kimaris' understanding, but he wasn't able to 'smell' deceit from her.

But... the saints that the church talk about in legends were supposed to have brought about miracles...

It was entirely possible that there were sorcerers among them. Tales passed down through legends and folklore were likely to change depending on who was passing them down. It was reasonable to guess that less than ten percent of said miracles were actually true miracles. Even so, if ten percent of the saints truly existed, miracles would be occurring repeatedly all over the world. But just what kind of miracle was being brought about now? Kimaris puzzled over the mystery as the girl let out a laugh.

"There's no need to look at me like that. I'm not lying here, you know? Can you not see through everything with that nose of yours?"

Kimaris had not even opened up to Zagan that he was able to tell what someone was thinking to an extent based on scent alone. He wasn't exactly reading minds, but he could sniff out whether someone

was in agreement or not, lying or not, and friendly or not. Such distinctions came easily to him. This was not sorcery, it was an inborn ability of leonins, so even Zagan would be incapable of obstructing it. And precisely because of this power, Kimaris strongly believed that this girl had to be protected.

"In any case, this is some karma. That child doesn't even know that the cat he's carrying about is the girl he himself saved before, but he is still desperately trying to protect her. As for the girl... I would never have thought that she would throw herself into an organization called Azazel..." Alshiera muttered with a sigh.

Kimaris had heard that Kuroka was once a part of Azazel, but Alshiera's little monologue sounded like there was some sort of karma to that as well.

It might be better to ask her about it...

However, asking her about it himself felt like he was trying to force her hand, so he simply asked her about what was relevant to what was happening now.

"By that child, you mean Sir Shax? Have those two met before?"

Alshiera didn't respond immediately. And before long, she began speaking as if reminiscing over the past.

"Five years ago, a certain settlement was destroyed by Archdemon Shere Khan."

Kimaris felt his fur stand on end at the mention of that name, and Alshiera covered her mouth, noticing her slip of the tongue.

"Oh yes... that also happened to you... didn't it?"

"...It's already five years past. You know everything, don't you?"

"Yes. I'm a naughty child who knows everything but does nothing. Now, and before," she replied, as if praying for her own punishment.

"If you believe so, why do you remain a spectator? I'm sure that with your power, you should be able to change the course of events as you wish."

Alshiera then replied with a strained smile as if it was a foolish question to ask.

"I do believe that some mere corpse that even death gave up on butting in on the fate of the living is absolutely absurd, though."

Kimaris squinted his eyes. This vampire didn't say that she had conquered death, or cast away death. Death had given up on her.

So she didn't become like this by her own will?

In that case, wasn't this far too cruel? It would mean that this girl had several hundred years, or even over a thousand years forced on her against her will. And just how did she interpret Kimaris' pitiful gaze? Alshiera continued talking with a hint of penitence to her voice.

"Now that I think of it, the incident at that time was also my fault... That settlement was under the protection of Archdemon

Marchosias. However, Marchosias' attention wasn't focused on the settlement... it was on me."

"Were you... being targeted at that time too?"

"Tragedy comes with being a misfortunate beauty," Alshiera playfully laughed, then her expression suddenly darkened as she continued, "...Marchosias said that he was unable to protect me. That's why he sent a 'certain something' to me. However, I didn't accept it. If I had just grumbled and took it... those children would surely have been protected too..."

In other words, that settlement that couldn't be protected was where Shax and Kuroka had met.

"Would you mind me asking?" Kimaris began carefully, "What exactly was that 'certain something'?"

He of course had no intentions of pressing the matter if she couldn't answer. If he didn't need to know about it to accomplish his work here, she could just remain silent. He implied this with his gaze, as Alshiera then firmly spoke its name.

"Seraph Hunter."

It had been sixty years since Kimaris became a sorcerer, but he had never heard this name before.

Is it some kind of tool meant for killing something called a seraph?

He had no idea what a seraph was, though. He had never heard the term used when describing any of the races or even monsters.

Alshiera let out a deep sigh.

"It's a power meant to kill god that myself, Solomon, and Marchosias created... It's a power that should no longer be necessary anymore."

An Archdemon, the progenitor of the Night Clan, and one other... someone else. Just what kind of power did those three create? Kimaris pinched his brow as he committed the important details to memory.

Miss Alshiera, Marchosias... and one more... what was the name she just said?

Kimaris didn't mishear her. Alshiera also wasn't trying to deceive him. He certainly did hear her say the name. But for some reason he couldn't remember it. It may even have been his imagination that he had heard one other name. Alshiera looked over Kimaris with a hint of sorrow in her eyes, as she then changed the subject in a self-deprecating tone.

"How miserable of me, isn't it? Trying to cling to a power that I threw away, I mean."

Kimaris shook his head.

"I don't believe so. If it is necessary for the future, then it is fine to use anything at hand, be it a power you once threw away or denied. At the very least, that's what it means to be a sorcerer."

Alshiera didn't reply, and simply returned a quiet smile. Instead, she whispered.

"One day, I would like to hear your story too."

"I'm more interested in your story, though."

This girl was full of secrets. Just what kind of life did she lead? How did she spend her time after her last breath? There were mountains of facts about her that piqued his interest.

Not that I think she'll tell me, though... Or so he thought, but Alshiera unexpectedly shook her head with a sincere expression.

"I am but a storyteller. A storyteller does not take center stage. That's why my story does not exist."

Her voice was full of grief, as if this was her atonement.

"Is that so?" Kimaris replied in comforting tone. "Even now, you are running about as we speak to try and save Miss Kuroka by your own will. Is that not the role of an actress on the stage?"

Such was the case, but Alshiera simply giggled to herself, knowing this full well.

"The storyteller should have died a little while ago. And yet, there was a troublesome child who wouldn't let them exit. And now that the storyteller isn't permitted to leave, I suppose they may in fact be standing on the stage."

This may have been the reason that Alshiera began taking action on her own. Death had given up on her, but was now banging on her door. This finally permitted her to feel alive.

The vampire then rose to her feet.

"Now then, we've had a long enough break. Let's chase after those two. If things go well, we may be able to save them from their regrets from five years ago too."

"Do you mean Miss Kuroka? Or Sir Shax? Or perhaps..."

"Both. They may in fact be the only ones capable of saving each other... It's more than sufficient for me to be the only one left living on with regrets." Alshiera paused, then smiled. "For an undead like me to live on, oh my, how laughable."

Kimaris once more transformed into a beast.

"You seem to be emphasizing that fact, but I don't believe it to be true. You may not be alive, but you've never stopped being human, right?"

That's what her scent was telling him.

Above all else, I believe you're one of those that must be saved.

He knew that she would not accept his words, so he held them to his chest. And in an unusual turn, Alshiera's façade crumbled with a grimace.

"...I really am poor at dealing with you."

"How unfortunate."

And as Kimaris return a sarcastic laugh, he bent down in front of her.

“Please get on. You’re in a hurry, right?”

Alshiera mounted on top of Kimaris with a complicated look on her face. After confirming that she was firmly holding his neck, the black lion began running.

“Judging by the direction... it seems Sir Shax is headed toward Archdemon Palace. His lab is there, and he could also borrow the help of other sorcerers.”

“Oh my, is it not abandoned right now, though?”

All the sorcerers at Archdemon Palace were rounded up to help Foll with her preparations for Alshiere Imera. Furthermore, there was no escape route there due to it being underground. In other words, Shax was being chased into a cul-de-sac.

To think the little lady’s plan would backfire on us like this!

It’s not like it was Foll’s fault. Nobody could predict that a new enemy would show up at such a timie. And yet, Alshiera nodded in admiration.

“This may in fact be a turn of good fortune. We’ll be able to take hold of *that* without worrying about our surroundings.”

“By that you mean... it’s in Archdemon Palace?”

“There’s nowhere else Marchosias would leave it behind.”

Just then, shadow-like undead once more appeared in their path.

“Black Claw,” Kimaris whispered, as his body was once more wrapped in light and transformed into a gale.

The undead trying to obstruct him were scattered to the wind-like scraps of paper torn up by a child throwing a tantrum.

“Oh my, what dreadful power.” Alshiera said with a smile.

“Moreover, you’re hiding an even more dreadful trump card are you not? Is it fine for me to be riding you despite that?”

Kimaris was unable to burn mana itself like Zagan could, but his sorcery gave birth to an abominable wind capable of crushing all who simply touched it. This was the sorcery he had mastered over ten years to take revenge. And with the power Zagan had granted him, this same power had entered an entirely new dimension of completion. It would not be all that difficult for him to strike down even an Archdemon as he was now. This of course applied to the target of his revenge as well. Nevertheless, Kimaris never did so.

Sir Zagan surpassed that easily in under half a year, anyway.

Kimaris’ Black Claw couldn’t come anywhere close to the Heaven’s Phosphor that the Archdemon wielded. Kimaris felt a certain sense of defeat from that fact. But even so, he understood full well just how Zagan was able to acquire power at such an exponential rate.

People grow stronger far faster for the sake of others than for

themselves.

That was why even the other Archdemons couldn't defeat Zagan, and it was also the reason Kimaris wanted to lend him his strength. And above all else, he was one who freely rewarded those who devoted such loyalty to him.

"A lion's fangs aren't meant just to show off one's own power." Kimaris muttered, as if to confirm his own resolve.

The reason for this was because a lion's simple presence instilled awe in all living creatures. One who wielded power only for their own sake was nothing more than a monster. But lions weren't monsters.

"A lion bares its fangs for its friends, the weak, or the strong that it deems worthy as their lord."

That's why Kimaris would not use his power to enact revenge.

I'm just mimicking Miss Gremory, though.

Nevertheless, this was the belief that drove Kimaris forward. And listening to his speech, Alshiera muttered in a somewhat envious tone.

"The living may be far stronger than I imagined..."

"Huh...?"

Both her tone and the atmosphere about her were clearly different from before. However, Kimaris had no leeway to question her further about it.

"Miss Alshiera. The smell of the undead has multiplied."

He thought they had exterminated them all as they ran through town, but seeing how they returned as long as their corpses were left behind just as Alshiera said, there was no way to keep up with those numbers. It would likely require Zagan's level of power to truly annihilate them. Kimaris had no way of knowing this, but Raphael's judgment of burning their bodies without leaving even a speck of ash behind was correct. Alshiera laughed as if she knew this all full well.

"Then would it not be sufficient to just gather them all up in one place?"

"Meaning...?"

"The ones they are chasing are myself and Kuroka. So, if we were to be together, all those good-for-nothings would gather around us."

"And you want us to fight like that?"

"Indeed. By now, the Silver-Eyed King and Balor's daughter should be around too, right?"

Kimaris was not permitted to use Heaven's Phosphor without Zagan's permission. As such, the only ones in town who could destroy the undead were Zagan and Gremory.

"But the scent of the undead already surpasses a hundred in number. Even if we were to seek Sir Zagan's aid, wouldn't it still be difficult to protect Kuroka and Shax while evading them all? Moreover, it's not guaranteed we can persuade Sir Zagan to do so

either.”

Even in her current state, Alshiera had no problem at all dealing with these undead. However, it was a different story if it came to doing so while also protecting Shax and the cat Kuroka.

Zagan would likely take action if they mentioned Kuroka, but in that case, they would have to explain what had happened to her body. And that would take quite some time. Just how much time could Alshiera’s body even hold out?

Even if they did make it, as long as the caster behind them survived, the undead could be recreated indefinitely. This would drive Alshiera and Kuroka further and further into a corner. And yet, Alshiera simply nodded without showing any signs of wavering.

“You’re right. Then let us clearly define our conditions for victory.”

Kimaris nodded as he continued running, and Alshiera raised her index finger.

“First. The safety of myself, Kuroka, and while we’re at it, that Shax fellow.” The reason she didn’t say survival was likely because she herself wasn’t really alive. “Second. The elimination of those good for nothings. About the only things that can erase them without a trace are the Silver-Eyed King, Balor’s daughter, and perhaps a dragon’s breath.”

As long as Kimaris didn’t have permission to use Heaven’s Phosphor Typhoon, he was unable to completely annihilate the undead. They also couldn’t rely on Foll’s breath as she was all the way back at the castle. They really did need Zagan or Gremory’s assistance. Alshiera then raised her third finger.

“Third. The elimination of the caster. This is likely the biggest problem. We don’t even know who the enemy is.”

It wasn’t like they didn’t have any clues. Archdemon Shere Khan once had a hand in the atrocious rare species hunt and was left as a husk of himself by Marchosias’ hand. But was that sorcerer even alive anymore? The probability that he was being impersonated by another just like Orias wasn’t all that low. Just how were they supposed to find someone they knew nothing about? Moreover, how were they supposed to eliminate them?

It was an extremely disadvantageous gamble, yet Alshiera simple laughed.

“I don’t believe we’ll make it short of a miracle happening.”

“Then we should—”

“Today is Alshiere Imera, a holy night where miracles occur, right? Then it won’t be all that bad an idea to pray for a miracle.”

What kind of god would answer the prayers of a vampire and a sorcerer? It was so laughable that Kimaris could only think of it as a

joke, but her voice mysteriously had a ring to it that made him want to believe in her.

“It seems you have some conviction behind that decision.”

“It’s not conviction, but hope. Don’t black cats bring about good luck?”

Kimaris put on a strained smile.

I’ve heard that Miss Kuroka has a rather unfortunate disposition, though.

It was to the point that Zagan would talk about it with a completely serious expression. It must have been quite severe.

Alshiera then bopped Kimaris on the neck.

“Now then, that’s enough talking. I’ve made my bet. What shall you do? Are you in?”

Taking a good look, Kimaris could spot what looked like Shax’s back in the distance, and he let out a sigh.

“It would be troublesome if we fail and there was nobody to shoulder the blame with me. Do get through this safely.”

Kimaris had clearly already thrown his chips in just by the fact that he was helping this girl.

And so, the girl and the lion split up.



“So? What’s this about?”

Zagan passed through Barbatos’ shadows in chase of Shax who likely knew where Kuroka was, and suddenly had Kimaris’ claws coming down at him, though they stopped just short of hitting him.

“Uhh... It’s quite difficult to explain...”

“Just give me a yes or no. Do you know where Shax is right now?”

It seemed he knew full well that Kimaris was secretly up to something today.

But, I promised not to pry further.

That’s why Zagan kept it short. Kimaris’ golden eyes shot open in surprise, as he then respectfully bowed his head.

“Yes. I believe they’re headed toward Archdemon Palace.”

“I see. I don’t know what’s chasing them, but I guess Archdemon Palace is closer than the castle, huh?”

It was to be expected of the one left in charge with Zagan’s subordinates at the church. His judgment was quite sound. That’s precisely why it would be regrettable to lose him here. He had to be saved. Zagan then threw out his next question.

“By they, you mean Kuroka’s with him?”

“Yes. However, it seems Kuroka has taken the form of an actual cat. I do not know the cause.”

“A cat...? Now that you mention it, she’s a caith, right...?”

The caith were said to be a race of cat fairies. They were

supposed to be closer to cats than the tabaxi.

“...Maybe it’s an ability that the cait sith originally possessed.”

And it was lost over the long passage of time. However, Kuroka was a rare specimen in that she had four ears. If that was a sign of atavism like with Nephy, then it wasn’t all that incomprehensible. Historical documentation on the cait sith was ambiguous to begin with, and there was almost nobody out there who even knew what really differentiated them from the tabaxi.

According to the information we found in Liucaon, many races were rendered extinct a thousand years ago.

If the few scant survivors all hid themselves in Liucaon, then it was only natural that little information of them remained on the continent.

Zagan then moved on to his last question.

“So, who are they?”

There was a countless number of corpses scattered around Kimaris that looked like they were fighting with him. Many of them looked to be dead, but there were still those trying to get back up. A barrier existed around town which could detect whenever any outsider was to step foot into Zagan’s domain.

Hundreds upon thousands outsiders would naturally come and go within a single day, but it was very likely that this was some large and organized group. Even though his barrier was on the lookout for such things, he was unable to detect their intrusion at all.

The only ones who don’t set off the barrier are those like Barbatos who can leap through space.

Leaping through space was extremely advanced sorcery, and there were few capable of doing it. This would conversely make it quite easy to trace who was behind it. But here, the rabble scattered across the ground didn’t look anything like exceptional sorcerers.

“Seems like they’re homunculi, but how did they get into town?”

For some reason, Kimaris looked like he received quite the shock from this statement.

“Homunculi...? Them...?”

“That’s what they look like to me?”

Homunculi were outside Zagan’s field of expertise, but Zagan had witnessed the sight of many homunculi who possessed no will during the case with Nephteros and Bifrons. The rabble here showed a resemblance to those pitiful creations.

Kimaris shook his head, astonished at his own absentmindedness.

“Having preconceptions is truly terrifying. I was completely fixated on them being undead.”

Seeing that Kimaris was unusually shaken and making statements unlike his usual self, Zagan narrowed his eyes.

“...I see, so Alshiera is involved.”

“Erk.”

Kimaris’ body stiffened up noticeably.

“It’s a misunderstanding Sir Zagan! She’s one of those being targeted! She is absolutely not the culprit instigating these assailants!”

“Well, if you say so, it must be true. However, it doesn’t change the fact that she brought these nuisances along.”

“That’s...”

Kimaris was at a loss for words.

“Fool.” Zagan replied with a sigh. “I said I would not pry. All you need do is answer with a yes or no.”

“Huh...?”

Kimaris didn’t look like he understood what was going on, so Zagan simply repeated his question.

“These are the enemies. Alshiera is not an enemy. Is that all?”

“...Y-Yes! I do not know their true nature, but they’re enemies. They also possess a disposition where another individual will come from their corpses.”

“In other words, they’ll keep crawling back up unless they’re completely annihilated.”

Several shadows began crawling out of the corpses while they chatted. However, Zagan wasn’t just standing there idly all this time. Small lights like powdered snow coiled themselves around the shadows. Seeing this, Kimaris’ eyes shot open once more.

“This is... Heaven’s Scale Snowfield?”

This was the power that Zagan had developed for his daughter’s sake. However, that wasn’t all there was to this sorcery.

“Indeed. However, it will now become something else. Heaven’s Phosphor Will O’ the Wisp.”

Zagan snapped his fingers, and the snowy lights wrapping around the shadows turned black in an instant. And just with that action, everything was over. The fallen shadows, the standing shadows, the shadows crawling out of the corpses, anything and everything was dyed in black and vanished into the wind. After observing the result, Zagan nodded in satisfaction.

“Hm. There’s nothing to criticize regarding the precision of its use.”

Zagan promised Foll that he would teach her Heaven’s Phosphor when she grew up. He believed that this power was suitable for his daughter to use.

A gulp could be heard from Kimaris’ throat.

“So you’ve even developed it in such a way...”

“Yeah. Having said that, it’s good that it hit everything I was aiming for, but there’s a need to attach multiple of each light to a

single body to turn it to ash. There's purpose in using it as a variation of Snowfield, but I can't say it's as outstanding as a standalone spell."

It didn't possess the penetrative power of the Fivefold Grand Flower nor the wide effective range of Autumn Lightning despite all being variations of Heaven's Phosphor. It appeared like a defective product at a glance, but Will O' the Wisp's true worth came in being able to select one's targets even in a large mob. It would be quite some time before he bestowed it to Foll too, so he had plenty of room for improvement.

But I guess I could say the final trial run for Heaven's Phosphor is complete with this.

Heaven's Phosphor was a spell which boasted of unparalleled offensive power as it burned the very essence of life itself. Nevertheless, Zagan didn't consider it to be complete. It wasn't able to burn the entirety of a giant and resilient body like that of the Sludge Demon Lord, and it wasn't flexible enough for dealing with a large number of enemies. Above all else, it burned everything it touched, so using a hostage was an easy way of sealing the move.

That's why Zagan gave birth to variations which covered for such deficiencies. Now that he had finished the last trial run, he could move on to completing the sorcery itself. All so he could massacre every enemy that shows up before him from now on, be it Archdemons, Demon Lord, demons, the church, or anyone else. All for the sake of living under the light of day alongside Nephy and Foll.

Well, lately I feel like it might be fine without slaughtering them all too.

But even so, he required power. Peace wasn't so simple that it could be brought about and maintained without conflict. It was like a cradle in a tree, even a breeze could bring it crashing down.

Peace was brought about on a foundation of peerless power and authority, imposing one's rule and bringing all those in opposition to ruin. It was the greatest asset which could only be obtained through bloody strife, atop a mountain of sacrifices.

That's why Zagan had to be stronger than all others. Zagan bit down on his resolve once more as he confirmed Will O' the Wisp's effectiveness, and turned toward the dumbfounded Kimaris.

"Now then, I must go and save Kuroka and Shax. If Alshiera is there too, I bet the rest of this rabble will be gathered around them. It's perfect for disposing of them."

Zagan didn't want to get involved with Alshiera, but he did save her once already, though it was at Nephy's request. He would permit having to save her incidentally while saving the others. In any case, Kimaris seemed fixated on protecting that vampire.

"And what will you do? Will you come along?" Zagan asked the

lion.

“Please allow me to accompany you, my liege.” Kimaris replied with a reverent bow. He then raised his head once more. “But, there is just one problem. There should be a caster manipulating them. The same thing will just repeat itself if the caster is left at large.”

If these were all homunculi, the existence of someone who created them was certain. Moreover, from what Kimaris had seen, it was possible that there was a completely inexhaustible supply of them. And yet, Zagan shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

“Well, that’ll work out on its own.”

“Meaning...?”

“That Gremory is strangely enthusiastic about this. She does want to fulfill her goal of embracing the whole world in her peaceful arms while preaching about love power, after all. Her drive to do so is worthy of admiration. Even if we just leave her at large, she will surely slug any idiot out there trying to ruin today’s festival.” Zagan commented in a tired voice.

Zagan himself didn’t really want to rely on that fact, but it was completely true that he had no choice but to accept it. Moreover, Barbatos was inexplicably here to help as well. No matter where the caster was, it wasn’t all that big a problem.

“...How do I put it...? I’m really sorry for Miss Gremory’s habitual behavior...”

It seemed that once one got involved with Gremory, they were bound to end up apologizing to others even if it wasn’t their fault.



Kuroka was completely bewildered while being held in the arms of a sorcerer who reeked of alcohol. She couldn’t wield her swords as a cat, and she didn’t know where her beloved swords the Moonless Sky were to begin with.

She was somehow able to recognize the length of her limbs, but she had no opportunity to stand on her own legs being carried around like this. Even now, she didn’t think she could walk around on her own. In short, she was a complete burden.

Why doesn’t this person just leave me and run away...?

The two of them were being chased. No, more specifically, it was likely Kuroka who was being chased. And yet...

“Tch, how the hell many of them are there? But don’t you worry one bit Blacky. I’ve got confidence when it comes to running away.”

The sorcerer threw something as he complained. The sound of an object cutting through the air was likely a knife that he had tossed out. Judging from the sound, Kuroka would normally be able to dodge such a knife toss with ease, but it struck its target nevertheless.

She could tell from the sound of the strike that the knife didn’t

pierce any bones, but was more wedged into a gap between the bones, likely around the knee or ankles. It wasn't fatal, but it was impossible even for a sorcerer to run with a knife lodged in such a place.

The enemy obstructing his path fell over, and the sorcerer ran through the opening. This sorcerer called himself weak, but Kuroka didn't think he was at all.

This person is strong. It's just that his sorcery isn't suited to attacking.

He was also quick-witted. Even when cornered, he would calmly search for his opponent's weakness, then break through cleverly and effectively. They had been in multiple dangerous situations now, but every time this man would act all flustered but calmly break through.

That's why Kuroka understood full well. If this man cast her aside, he would easily get away safely.

If he knew who I really was, he wouldn't even think of saving me...

Kuroka recognized his scent. He was likely one of Zagan's subordinates stationed at the church. She didn't know his name. It was suspicious whether he even knew Kuroka's face either.

Even though they both lived at the church, Kuroka proactively avoided contact with sorcerers. As a former member of Azazel, a secret organization specializing in dealing with sorcerers, it would only make sorcerers uncomfortable to deal with her.

To reiterate, this man was tremendously sharp and able compared to his own self-evaluation. She didn't believe that he would be stupid enough not to have information on how dangerous a person Kuroka was. If he knew who she actually was, he would surely put all his effort into keeping away from her.

So isn't it unfair that I'm being protected here...?

There may have been people like Zagan or this man who would hold their hand out to her among the many sorcerers she killed. When she lamented over this fact, Zagan told her to live. That was a sin she committed out of a necessity to survive.

Kuroka wanted to accept what he said. She wanted to carry the burden of her sins and live on facing forward. She decided that she would change.

However, that was simply Kuroka's own resolve. There was no obligation for any sorcerers to help a former member of Azazel. She felt like she was deceiving this man. It gave her an irrepressible sense of discomfort. She thought it would be better if she could just run away on her own.

But if she tried to do that, this sorcerer would surely come to save her. This left her in a complete dilemma, and Kuroka ended up just remaining in his arms obediently.

There was also one more reason for her bewilderment.

I wonder what this is? It feel kind of... nostalgic.

The scent itself wasn't nostalgic, but she felt like this wasn't the first time she was held in somebody's arms like this. She tried searching her memories for why she thought this, when suddenly, the sorcerer came to a stop.

"Hang on a sec Blacky."

He then put Kuroka down. She could sense cold stone beneath her four paws. It wasn't a flattened surface, but more akin to a cobbled surface by a river. It wasn't suited to be traversed by carriage. It was more the kind of stone used in the alleyways or to compensate for steep inclines. This was likely one of the hill paths leading further away from the church, or some sort of staircase.

The sorcerer seemed to be opening some kind of door. He was facing a wall, so perhaps there was some sort of hidden path. Thinking of how it required both his hands, it was likely quite heavy, or was some sort of apparatus which required sorcery to manipulate.

He seemed to have noticed Kuroka's worried gaze, as she then replied with a meow and he returned to his work. The mechanism apparently took quite some time to open, so Kuroka took the time to search her surrounding for other presences.

She had no choice but to be bewildered by her transformation into a cat, though the whiskers poking from her nose were unexpectedly exquisite.

Even without anything touching them directly, she could precisely feel the flow of air from them, and could even recognize the oscillation of sound from them. It seemed that the roots of the whiskers were particularly sensitive.

When she brought her nose close to the ground, she could even sense muffled footsteps. Going down from four ears to two was like having a wall behind her at all times, but thanks to her whiskers, it could be said that her field of vision, so to speak, had expanded.

Sensing through her whiskers that multiple footsteps were approaching them, Kuroka's fur stood on end as she let out a menacing hiss.

"Shit. They already caught up? This way Blacky."

The door had apparently finished opening. The sorcerer once more picked up Kuroka, and though the sound of footsteps were now distant as her whiskers were no longer next to the ground, she now sensed a strange vibration in the air.

This is... some kind of flapping...?

The flapping didn't seem to be coming from insects, but it was too rapid to be that of birds. It also felt like there was an entire flock of them. Kuroka was unable to identify them, seeing as she was not yet accustomed the sensation from her whiskers, but she could tell that the flock was headed straight for them.

Kuroka turned toward the flapping and hissed menacingly. Even if she couldn't speak, she could at least convey the impending danger to the sorcerer, who turned around in irritation.

"What is it now?"

Contrary to Kuroka's expectation, they didn't begin running again, but she felt like her body was floating in the air. It wasn't because she was being embraced. Apparently the sorcerer had jumped off something.

We're falling...? And... really far?

They were maybe plummeting down a water well. She could tell from the sound of the wind that they were falling through a narrow space. Thinking of how they had yet to hit the ground despite falling for a few seconds, it must have connected to quite a deep location. But the sound of flapping wings was persistently chasing after the plummeting pair nonetheless.

What's chasing us?

Even now, Kuroka had no idea what was chasing them. Judging from the sorcerer's reaction, it was likely something inhuman. And being so focused on that flapping, Kuroka failed to notice that the footsteps that were chasing them had suddenly vanished.

"Oh my, what a convenient place for a seat."

She suddenly heard a young girl's voice. Following that, what sounded like the sorcerer gasping from being crushed rang out. Apparently the owner of the girl's voice fell on top of the sorcerer. Judging from the impact of the collision, she appeared to have quite the small build.

"Guagh. Th-The hell?"

"My goodness, I thought it was a chair but it seems to be alive. I'll be using the top of your head for a bit."

The girl giggled in a sweet voice.

But... what is this smell...?

Was it perfume? It was just the slightest bit sweet, but she practically couldn't smell anything like sweat or saliva from this person's hair or skin. It was like a counterfeit smell made to imitate that of a living being, like they were a puppet, or a sorcerer-created homunculus.

Perhaps having noticed Kuroka's wariness, the young girl brushed the cat's head. Her hand was cold, small, thin, yet somehow gentle.

"Please do not be afraid. I am not your enemy."

"Wh-What's with this brat? The hell did you come fr—"

"Do you not have something more important to focus on? The ground is getting quite close."

"Erk!"



The sorcerer panicked and decelerated their descent instantly. It was likely some sort of floating sorcery. However, now that their descent had stopped, it meant they weren't running away anymore. Kuroka could sense something enormous falling down from above.

"Oh my, it seems some fresh ones have gushed out already."

"Fresh ones... oh crap!"

Kuroka sensed yet another object falling down from further above. This time it was even larger, and there were more than one of them.

Judging from the footsteps from before though... it's kind of late?

The footsteps she had heard before were basically right on the sorcerer's tail when he jumped. But they weren't so light that they could belong to this little girl.

And as if to answer Kuroka's confusion, she could sense the girl stretch out her arm as the sound of clanging chains rang out.

"Gah?!" "Gyeee!"

The presence of falling objects vanished together with some screams. No, the presence itself was still there. They had been obstructed, and their fall was cut short.

"Well, as to be expected of a hidden passage in Archdemon Palace. It seems the traps are in perfect condition."

"Traps...? I guess so, huh?"

The sorcerer looked directly above him and muttered dubiously. Apparently there was something quite peculiar directly above them.

But... Archdemon Palace? That's the name of the former Archdemon's base, right...?

That's apparently where the sorcerer escaped to. Kuroka had heard rumors that Archdemon Palace was located underneath Kianoides, but she didn't really believe that something like that existed right below a town where an Archangel was stationed.

The group's descent eventually came to a stop, and the sorcerer landed on the ground. The atmosphere was cold and stuffy. They seemed to be in some sort of cave. The sorcerer then called out to the girl, who was still riding somewhere on his shoulders or back.

"So? Who the hell are you? What're you doing here... actually where did you come from? And why do you know about Archdemon Palace?"

The little girl continued brushing Kuroka's head and replied in a tone that was difficult to judge as serious.

"I'm the same as you. I'm also being chased by those strange beings. And after spotting you running away from them, I decided to accompany you."

"Accompany me...? Hang on, how long you planning on sitting on me? Get down."

If he didn't like it, he should've just shook her off, yet the sorcerer just stopped at complaining.

"Oh my," the girl replied with a giggle, "you'll carry this child around but I'm not allowed? I do believe that I am no lighter than a cat myself."

"There's no way in hell... huh? Hey, you injured?"

Kuroka could tell through the hand petting her head that the girl's body stiffened up just a little.

It's true. She smells of blood.

Following the scent, Kuroka lapped at the girl's side. Even though she could smell the blood, there was no taste.

"...There really is something wrong with me today. To think I would be so incapable of concealing it."

Her voice was surprisingly frail, and gave off an air of exhaustion in complete contrast to her usual attitude.

The sorcerer then scratched the back of his head helplessly.

"...Seriously. What an unlucky day. Come on, show me. I can do any kinda simple treatment."

"It is well beyond you. After all, I'm not among the living."

As she replied, the girl brought her hand to her face. She was likely showing him the inside of her mouth or something. The sorcerer gulped down in surprise.

"You're... a vampire?"

"Yes. That's why there is nothing you can do for me."

"...Why is a vampire being chased by those guys?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not know. Is that not the same for you two?"

"You're using me as a damn chair here, don't you think you can be a bit friendlier?"

The girl was apparently exactly as Kuroka imagined judging from her young voice, but the sorcerer wasn't so foolish as to be beguiled by that. It was clear as day that this girl knew what was going on. And in response to the sorcerer's vigilant suggestion, the young girl let out a sigh with a nod.

"Friendlier...? I suppose so."

The girl cocked her head to the side in consideration, and then Kuroka sensed her smile. She began rustling about in what sounded like a packed handbag, though it seemed to be strangely round, and fished out something strangely long for the size of the bag.

"I shall yield this to you."

"The hell is this? A cane... from the church?"

Kuroka's tails stood on end.

A cane? Is it maybe mine?

The little girl continued speaking in a nonchalant tone.

“I picked it up earlier while running about. But, this is no simple cane. Indeed, this is the legacy of a *certain tribe* that was wiped out five years ago.”

Kuroka stiffened up. However, the sorcerer was far more shaken by this than she was.

“...Hey. Why the hell do you know that?”

The girl ignored his question, and continued as if singing.

“Now about that tribe, there happened to be but a single survivor. This cane is originally something that she should possess, but alas, she has vanished and is nowhere to be found.”

“By vanished, you mean she’s being chased? Or are you saying that cane is the target?”

“Now then, I wonder which it is? All I can tell you is that you should be the one to return this cane to that girl.”

Kuroka could tell that the girl’s focus had shifted. She was now certain. This girl approached them knowing full well who Kuroka truly was.

But, why is this sorcerer so perturbed?

It seemed that this sorcerer had some sort of link to that incident five years ago...

“Why?!” the sorcerer yelled back angrily, then said, “That brat back then was just some tabaxi, right?! Why does she gotta be hounded like this?!”

Huh...?

Those words finally connected the dots in Kuroka’s mind. That was exactly it. Kuroka was in fact the only survivor, and by the time she came to, she was already being sheltered by the church. She completely thought that her mother had carried her all the way there, but she never knew why her mother’s body wasn’t there.

Didn’t that mean that there was someone else who got Kuroka out of there? Their heart was beating like a hammer. They were so nauseated by their agitation that they felt like vomiting.

No, it’s also possible that he’s the sorcerer who attacked us... right?

Abandoning all thought was the same as escaping. That was why that possibility came to mind. But this sorcerer was simply too honest for such doubts.

Would someone who would so desperately try to save one cat be able to perform that sort of massacre?

Even if he was the culprit from five years ago, his ego would surely be unable to bear the weight of his sins.

And then, the little girl spoke as if to definitely thrust the truth before her.

“That girl is not a tabaxi, but a cait sith. She is a descendant of the Silver-Eyed King and an atavist of an ancient bloodline. Did you not

notice it yourself? She's been so near to you all this time."

Kuroka's heart began beating like a hammer from the confusion and unrest.

I don't know any of this. I'm scared. Why does this person know so much about me that I don't?

She was especially scared of what sort of expression the sorcerer was making right now. If what she said was true, Kuroka was saved by a sorcerer, yet devoted herself to Azazel out of hatred for sorcerers. And this was known by the sorcerer who saved her. Such was the case, but...

"Like I know the damn difference between a tabaxi and a cait sith. Besides, I don't know anything that happened to that brat after throwing her into the church."

Kuroka completely thought that this man realized that she had become a cat, and opened her mouth in astonishment. She could also tell that the girl was making quite a sorrowful expression herself.

"I thought you were quick-witted, but perhaps that was a misunderstanding..."

"Hah?"

The sorcerer showed no sign of realizing, and the girl let out a sigh as she pointed above them.

"That's all the time we have for chatting. It won't hold any longer."

"Tch. You're gonna properly explain all this later you hear?!"

"...I intended to explain it in a rather easy to understand way just now, though..."

Just this once, Kuroka sympathized with the mysterious girl. The sorcerer then hoisted the little girl onto his shoulder and handed Kuroka over to her.

"Hey, don't you dare drop Blacky, got it?"

"Yes, yes. I won't drop her... you properly understood, right?"

For the voice had such a pitiful hint of unease to it that Kuroka couldn't help but meow back at her. However, even though she appeared to be a small girl, the feeling of her lap and her merciless voice reminded Kuroka of her own mother.

That... was mom...

The strange being that she had met immediately before becoming a cat smelt like the enemy who had burned her village. However, they had the same voice as her mother. Did her mother become an undead? Moreover, why did she only appear now...?

She received no answers to her surge of questions, and had no means of asking them either.

"Why are you talking to a cat?" The sorcerer mumbled with a sigh. "More importantly, at least tell me your name."

Kuroka could tell full well that the girl's face was saying "You're the only one I don't want to hear that from." She then put on an all-important air as she answered him.

"Alshiera. It's quite the coincidence, but today is my birthday."

"Alshiera...? A vampire pretending Alshiere Imera is about her? That's some great taste you got there. Then you just call me the fairy Tonto."

Tonto was the name of a fairy who brought presents to all the good children on the night of Alshiere Imera. The fairy itself didn't exist and was just a tale for children, but it was something like a mascot for Alshiere Imera.

"Oh my, I have yet to utter even a single lie, though..."

The girl once more shrugged her shoulders regrettably.

But, if she isn't lying, what exactly does this all mean?

Because of Kuroka's job, she had memorized the church's scriptures to the point where she could read them aloud. Alshiere was the name of a particularly important saint in the church. And since the god of the church had no name, it could even be said that Alshiere was a name which represented the whole church.

And here a vampire, the complete antipode of a saint, was naming herself as such. If it wasn't just some sort of spiteful choice like the sorcerer thought it was, then just what meaning was there behind that?

The mystery only deepened further, but as the sorcerer began running once more, Kuroka was no longer able to think about it anymore.



Back in town outside a certain general store.

"Mrr? I feel like I just sensed a surge of love power from Lady Kuroka."

"Hey Miss Gremory, do you know where Kuroka is?" a small vulpine girl asked.

"I'm not entirely sure, but I can sense her. An extraordinary torrent of love power has taken shape with Lady Kuroka at its center!"

Gremory stood up with a seriously rotten expression as Nephy sent her a cold gaze.

"...Miss Gremory. We must currently consider Kuroka's safety, could you be quiet?"

"I feel as though you've been particularly strict toward me lately, Lady Nephy."

With her heart immediately torn apart, Gremory sank to the ground and cradled her knees.

"Thank you very much, Lord Barbatos. We managed to get by without Master Zagan noticing us thanks to you."

“You guys just thought I was a damn handyman, right?”

Barbatos was left inevitably glaring at them, to which Chastille bowed her head while gripping the edges of her skirt.

“Sorry. But you really saved us. It’s true that we’re thankful for it, Barbatos.”

“Urgh... Well, whatever.”

Chastille looked up at him with a sincere gaze, and Barbatos turned red and looked to the side, making one wonder where all his criticism had gone.

Her outfit is quite cute after all.

As for Chastille, she was simply standing there dumbfounded, unable to understand what that reaction meant.

“Did I say something to offend you?”

“The hell? How’d it come to that?”

“But, you’re angry?”

“I’m not!”

“...See? You’re angry.”

“I’m telling you I’m not...”

She apparently took Barbatos’ blushing for anger. This left even Nephy sighing.

Chastille... that’s far too pitiful for Lord Barbatos...

Well, it couldn’t really be helped since Chastille wasn’t in work mode. She found this both charming and vexing at the same time and strained a smile at them.

“Hey, isn’t Kuroka in danger? Take this seriously.” Nephteros interrupted them.

And having someone finally say something proper in the current situation, the small vulpin girl even had tears in her eyes.

“Sniff, thanks Miss Nephteros.”

“It’s alright. Big Br... Zagan went to save her. Believe in him.”

The vulpine girl, whose name was apparently Kuu, recovered slightly from having Nephteros comfort her. And looking over them, now it was Stella who had questions.

“I don’t really get what’s going on, but is it something you can tell me about?”

“Yes. Miss Stella, you are Master Zagan’s older sister, after all.” Nephy answered, as Stella nodded back.

“What kinda girl is this Kuroka?”

“Let’s see... Putting it simply, she is the daughter of Master Zagan’s butler. Her circumstances are somewhat complicated, so she usually weighs on Master Zagan’s mind.”

“A butler! That Zagan. I leave him alone for a bit and he’s living all nice and proper, huh? Ah... your big sis is so happy... hang on, doesn’t that mean we have to save that girl?”

Stella then turned around and looked at the young Lisette who was clinging to her from behind.

“Hm? But judging from the timing of the attack, is the culprit maybe the same guy who attacked Lisette?”

“Hah? There’s no wait it’s the same prick. That’s just a normal ass girl, right? The ones being targeted are likely all rare sp... uh... oops...” Barbatos replied casually, to which everyone focused on him.

“Lord Barbatos, do you know something about this incident?”

“Aaah, not really, it’s more like Zagan forced it on me or something...”

“I shall request Master Zagan to recompense you, so please tell us about it, Lord Barbatos.”

“...Dammit. What a shitty day.”

Nephy lowered her head and pleaded him to tell them, leaving Barbatos with a sour expression. He then went on to tell them about the incidents five years ago and what was happening now.

“Rare species hunt...?”

“Yeah. The one who’s likely leading around the cat lady right now is called Shax. He was the culprit’s, Archdemon Shere Khan’s disciple. I got no clue why he’s being chased after all this time, but judging from what he said, he likely betrayed Shere Khan or something and now he’s here to pay him back.”

“But why has he appeared within Master Zagan’s domain?”

Zagan had already reached a stage where it was unthinkable for even another Archdemon to plot against him. These were the fruits of his labor over the past half a year. That’s why those with special circumstances like Nephy were able to live peaceful lives.

“Why?” Barbatos replied in exasperation. “You even realize how many rare species are gathered here?”

“Oh...”

Nephy turned red to the face. It didn’t even need to be mentioned. It wasn’t just the cait sith Kuroka, but the high elves Nephy and Nephteros, the dragon Foll, the natives of Liucaon Selphy and Lilith, as well as the sorcerers Gremory and Kimaris whose races were said to even be extinct.

There was a mountain of reasons for this town to be targeted. Barbatos leaned against a wall as he continued explaining.

“Considering the time it happened, the one who destroyed that cat lady’s home was probably Shere Khan. Moreover...”

Barbatos then shifted his attention to Gremory. In an unusual turn, the witch was pale to the face.

It couldn’t be... is Miss Gremory also being targeted, I wonder?

The fomorians were also a bloodline on the verge of extinction, but judging by Gremory’s reaction, it felt like that wasn’t that case.

“That damn Kimaris... I wondered why he wasn’t hounding me today... so that’s what’s going on.”

Gremory hung her head down and grumbled to herself before suddenly pulling out an enormous scythe from her clothes.

“Lady Nephy, I have some business to attend to.”

“Miss Gremory?”

Her expression wasn’t her usual foolish self, it was bloodcurdling.

“Please calm down Miss Gremory! Where do you plan on going in the first place?”

“Yeah. You have no idea where the culprit is, right?” Nephteros added.

“Grr...”

Gremory came to a stop as if her anger had lost sight of where to go. Nephy took her hand, and looked straight into her eyes.

“It’s alright. Master Zagan is with him. If danger is to approach Sir Kimaris, Master Zagan would surely never abandon him. Master Zagan’s feet are even faster than his at such times, after all. So Miss Gremory, please believe in him and wait.”

Something bad would surely happen if Gremory were to go now. Nephy urged her with a near unreasonable hunch about how things would turn out, and Gremory’s vigor abated as she nodded meekly back to her.

“O-Okay! I get it already. You’re too close! You’re too close Lady Nephy!”

“Oh... my apologies.”

Nephy let go of her hand, and Gremory sank to her knees and put her hand to her chest.

“Hnngh, to think Lady Nephy would be so overbearing, I was careless... Ah, crap, my nose is bleeding.”

Gremory had apparently returned to her usual self. However, they still had no clues as to what was going on from what Barbatos had told them. It wasn’t clear where the culprit was, or if it really was Archdemon Shere Khan. Such was the case, but...

“Um, hey, I probably know where he is. The culprit I mean.”

And the one to speak up here, was Stella.

“Huh?”

“I just have to search for the real body of the one who targeted Lisette, right?”

Stella brushed back her bangs and revealed her artificial eye.

“This eye can see traces of mana-like threads in the air. I was a little curious about the ones coming outta the guy who attacked Lisette, so if we just follow it, can’t we get to the culprit?”

“I see.” Barbatos’ eyes shot open. “That the same as that ass Zagan’s eyes?”

“What do you mean?”

“Zagan can see mana as if it had actual form. That’s why he can easily weave together stupidly complicated and detailed sorcery.”

In other words, Stella’s artificial eye possessed the same power.

“In that case, we can probably find him. But, if the culprit is in fact Shere Khan, we can’t just go and pick a fight. Bifrons got the shit beat out of him for the same crap. We need some kinda plan. Not that we can ever prepare enough to go and scrap with an Archdemon, though.”

Nephteros’ expression clouded over ever so slightly at the mention of Bifrons. It surely wasn’t an easy feat to forget her previous master.

Nephy was left somewhat stumped at Barbatos’ entirely logical point. However, the first to deny him was Nephteros.

“There’s no need to take him head on or anything, right? He’s the one standing back safely while sending out his underlings, right? It just means we should do the same and attack him from safety.”

“But, how do we...?” Nephy asked in bewilderment, to which Nephteros simply looked back at her in astonishment.

“With your celestial mysticism, Nephelia. When do you ever plan on using it if you don’t use it for a time like this?”

It was like a bolt out of the blue. Both mysticism and celestial mysticism were powers that simply came to Nephy from the heavens. They weren’t powers she obtained by her own strength. Precisely because it was borrowed power, Nephy never thought of proactively putting it to use.

But, if Master Zagan is to lend his strength to Kuroka...

Then it may have been worth giving it a try. However, there was a problem precisely because Nephy tended to keep this power at a distance.

“Am I capable of such a skillful feat, I wonder? I’ve only used celestial mysticism a single time by mimicking you.”

“There’s no need to worry. I’ll handle the minute control. You have more firepower than me, so just pour in everything you’ve got.”

This may in fact have been the moment that these two sisters were truly working hand in hand.

As the older sister, I can’t possibility shrink back now can I?

Nephy nodded back firmly.

“Understood. I’ll be relying on you, Nephteros.”

After the sisters traded nods, Stella cut in.

“Hang on a sec? I said I could see the threads of mana, but there’s strangely a ton of them. I think there’s maybe over a hundred of em. I’m gonna need some help with it maybe.”

“Help? You can’t do it?” Barbatos asked, and Stella shook her head.

“It’s because it’s the artificial eye’s power. Even if I can see it, I can’t touch it.”

“See...? Hmm. Hey, are you perhaps unable to share your sight with others?” Gremory asked.

“Share...? Nope, it might not be impossible, but I’m still a novice sorcerer. All I’ve got in my brain is how to hit people, I don’t know any sorcery for sharing my sight. Is it hard?”

“If you don’t think it’s impossible, then you should be able to. We have four people here who are former Archdemon candidates and direct disciples of Archdemons. We can weave together some mere sight sharing sorcery completely impromptu.”

The former Archdemon candidates were Gremory and Barbatos, while the personal disciples of the Archdemons were Stella and...

“Huh, me too?”

Nephteros stood there blinking back in surprise.

“Celestial mysticism is not your only redeeming feature is it now?”

“...Got it. I don’t know how much I can help, though.”

Seeing her little sister being relied on, Nephy put her hand to her chest.

Even I’m learning sorcery directly from Master Zagan...

And yet, she was hopelessly behind on this front. Zagan had told her that she was more than fast enough at absorbing it all, but compared to Gremory, Barbatos and Foll she was basically completely incapable. It would probably be arrogant to assume that she could catch up in just half a year, but she felt ashamed that she couldn’t be useful in such situations.

She then noticed that her best friend next to her was also twiddling her fingers in a crestfallen manner as well.

“Is something the matter Chastille?”

“Not really, I can’t follow what’s going on when you talk about sorcery is all. It’s just a little disappointing...”

It was only reasonable for an Angelic Knight to feel like a complete outsider in a conversation between sorcerers. Nephy could only return a bitter smile to her as she had the same concern on her mind, though.

But, I’ll show that I can be useful!

Just as Stella said, it surely wasn’t impossible. A technique to accomplish what they wanted certainly existed, and there were those present here who could do so. However, it was such good fortune that all pieces to do so were completely gathered in one place that it could be called a miracle.



“Hey, you’re kidding me, right...? Why isn’t anyone here?”

Shax was left in shock after running to Archdemon Palace. It was an old ruin whose walls could serve as a fortress located underneath Kianoides. There was a space akin to a courtyard directly at the front door, and Gremory's golem was enshrined there as if guarding the gate.

Normally, sorcerers and familiars used for communication would be running about here in a rush. Gremory and many other sorcerers were left with managing the palace, and Shax chose to run here, since it was closer than Zagan's castle, but it seemed to be completely deserted.

And with no help to be found, it was no better than a cul-de-sac. He could at least scrounge up a few weapons by digging through his lab, but it didn't seem like they would be particularly useful against an army of undead.

Shit, why the hell is my luck so bad?!

In truth, Shax's judgement wasn't wrong. Under normal circumstances, he could have Gremory save him, and it was also simple to request for reinforcements from Zagan here. His luck just happened to be extraordinarily bad this time around. He did in fact receive a letter from Foll which notified him of the situation, but he had stuck it in his pocket and never read it. He was attacked by an undead the moment he was going to.

"Meow..."

What was even more unfortunate was that he was carrying a cat who was even more unlucky than he was. Alshiera found the sight of Shax panicking, not knowing the situation at hand at all, rather charming.

"Tonto, have we not arrived at our destination? Please hurry up and open the door."

This was still the base of an Archdemon. The front gate required authorization from a sorcerer under Zagan's command to open. Traps would immediately activate if any outsider were to attempt to do so. This vampire surely knew this full well herself.

Well, I guess barricading myself inside is better than nothing.

With no other choice at hand, Shax lowered the girl to the ground and touched the gate. The gate had no padlock, no doorknob, and nothing that resembled a keyhole. But upon touching it, a terrifyingly intricate and complex circuit took shape. This circuit was like a puzzle, and wouldn't allow the door to be opened unless a predetermined process was followed.

After Shax traced his finger along the magic circle several times, a heavy sound rang out and the door began opening.

He's really insane to set up such a complicated circuit just for a lock.

And perhaps that was just to be expected of an Archdemon. The

magic circle was even capable of individually distinguishing between the mana of all of Zagan's subordinates. It made Shax dubious as to whether Zagan possessed an extrasensory organ far outside the realm of regular humans.

After Shax watched the door open in both admiration and exasperation, Alshiera slipped in through the opening.

"You would do well to hurry up. They've already caught up."

"Huh...?"

Shax turned around and spotted the shadowy undead surging into the courtyard behind him.

How the hell many are there?!

There were more than just ten or twenty of them, it was already in the realm where they were uncountable due to the darkness in the area as well. Shax dashed into Archdemon Palace, left at his wit's end.

After slamming the door shut in a hurry, he immediately heard a repulsive scream.

"Teehee, it really is the Silver-Eyed King's trap. He shows no compassion for intruders."

It seemed that the Archdemon's trap was rampaging on the other side of the door. However, Alshiera's expression didn't reflect the composure of her words, and she began walking off the moment Shax wasn't about to question her about it.

"This way."

"Huh? You been here before?"

"Back when Marchosias was the lord, I was invited over just once. It was quite a long time ago, though."

Archdemon Palace was the preceding Archdemon Marchosias' base, and it hadn't even been a year since his death. It was completely unknown when exactly this vampire came by here.

Alshiera carried on with certain steps as Shax then called her to a stop.

"Hey. Where are you going? The only thing that way is the archives. There's nothing else..."

"Except for a graveyard. That's fine."

Archdemon Palace was vast. It's said that even Zagan didn't have a full grasp of the place. Nevertheless, Alshiera was headed toward the outer archives as well as a strange space that was somewhat like a graveyard.

"And what exactly is gonna be at a graveyard?"

"...Who knows? Let's just say it's my intuition."

Is there something there more worth it than dropping by my lab?

The traps outside would not last much longer. Even if one assumed that the traps were able to obstruct a powerful sorcerer, they would be unable to hold an unlimited army at bay. It was likely

difficult to set hundreds of different traps that could all fully realize their potential around each other. The time the few traps that were out there were capable of buying was precious.

On the other hand, just how much could he trust this mysterious vampire in the first place?

“Hey missy, are you somehow related to Marchosias?”

“I wouldn’t go so far as to say we were related. I was... no, we siblings would be more appropriate... we were acquainted to the former lord of the castle.”

Her reply seemed to hold deep implications.

The fact that she went out of the way to correct herself means that her brother or sister or whatever is also related?

But the preceding Archdemon Marchosias was famous for not having any disciples or women by his side in his final years. Moreover, even if she mentioned former lord, Archdemon Palace was Marchosias’ base for a thousand years. It wasn’t very likely that there even was another lord of the castle other than Zagan.

It felt like Shax had even more questions now, but judging by her willingness to share that detail, this girl seemed to suggest that she was being amicable.

The spiral staircase from the entrance hall led to an open space with a countless number of bookshelves lining the walls. Alshiera did not even glance at any of the books, and simply proceeded further within. The sound of something being smashed then rang out from the entrance hall.

“Oh my, it seems they’ve already broken through. Does this mean that we have finally been cornered?”

“Now’s not the time for casual commentary! This is bad! What’re you gonna do?!”

It may in fact have been a better idea to go to his lab, even if it would have only provided him temporary peace of mind. Yet Alshiera simply looked at the panicking Shax with an air of exasperation about her.

“I do believe I already lent you a weapon.” She said as she pointed to the cane from the church she handed over just moments ago.

“The hell is this old stick gonna do for us?”

“Haa... there’s a sword hidden within. Do Sacred Swords not work well against the undead?”

Shax didn’t notice until she mentioned it. The cane really did have a gap in it, which revealed a short sword as he pulled on it.

I mean, it’d be nice and all if this is a Sacred Sword, but ain’t this just a knife?

But when he had drawn it about halfway out, an electric shock ran through his body as if to reject him.

“Oow?!”

“No need to be so angry. Please just cooperate a little...”

Mysteriously enough, the shock from the short sword stopped as Alshiera appealed to it.

“What did you do?”

“Oh? Just what do you think a vampire can do to a sacred weapon of the church?”

Shax was left completely confused as to who this little girl truly was. However, the one who looked even more shocked than him was the black cat. Its eyes were so wide open that it felt like they would fall right out.

They continued to head deeper within, and eventually came upon a desolate space separate from everything else. Despite being within a building, the walls were made of stone. And enshrined in the center was a single coffin sealed with chains.

Shax had never been in this room himself. Taking a closer look, the coffin had a crude cross as well as a line of inscriptions running across its lid. He tried to read what they said, but he didn't have the time to do so.

“Shit, they're finally here.”

A swarm of undead was creeping toward them, mowing down the bookshelves in their way. Shax pulled a short sword from the cane and then addressed the cat.

“Blacky, be a good girl and stay here. It's gonna get a little busy.”

Alshiera seemed to imply that the sword would be somewhat useful against the undead, but this wasn't really a situation that he could handle on his own. Nevertheless, he wanted to act tough in front of the cat.



“Now then, our little fairy is putting in some work for us now, so it's about time that I part ways with you.”

The young girl, Alshiera, came to a stop, and held Kuroka up to her face as she spoke. They had apparently entered a small room, but the air was damp and cold as if they were in a cave. All this despite walking through what was clearly a building up until now. Kuroka still didn't have a full grasp of the situation at hand.

“I'll give you one last piece of advice. What happened to your body isn't a catastrophe.”

Alshiera told the cat as she rubbed her forehead against her. With that, Kuroka felt like the girl's emotions, despite her not even having a heartbeat, were conveyed to her. There was affection in her, like that of a mother.

Who exactly is this...?

And why did she feel this way about Kuroka despite them having

never met before?

"The cait sith are the most blessed fairies in the world. They change misfortune to fortune, and those who simply see them are blessed. You are one of such a loved people."

A bringer of fortune? Me?

It was a little strange for her to admit it herself, but Kuroka believed she was essentially the antipode of fortune. She tried not to pay attention to it, but she would trip over nothing, have water splash over her despite there being clear skies overhead and other such events. She had an abnormal amount of misfortune visit her every day.

And this was all before she had lost her sight. She'd never even heard of the cait sith possessing such a power either. Yet the girl before her continued speaking with an air of confidence about her.

"So pray. Pray for your own fortune. Pray to grant luck to those you wish to save. If you do, you will surely call upon the miracle you desire."

Alshiera whispered in her ear, then quietly lowered Kuroka to the ground. Kuroka could feel the sensation of crude stone from her paws. She couldn't even meow back in response, her eyes simply darted about in confusion.

Alshiera then left her behind and proceeded deeper within the room. A short while later, the sound of metal clanging about, as if chains were being undone, rang out.

What are you saying I can even do here?

Alshiera called her a bringer of good fortune, but this sounded outrageous. Kuroka had only ever experienced a chain of misfortune since her birth. It was to the point where she thought it was possible that the calamity facing the sorcerer who was protecting her now was something she had brought about as well.

Well... I may be better off compared to Mister and Lady Nephy, though... Even though she believed that she had lost everything, there were unexpectedly many people who had saved Kuroka. It may have been that she was simply filled with the conceit that all was lost to her. However, it was unreasonable to try and cling to that good fortune in this situation.

Lilith and Selphy had their own duties to attend to. And despite it being Alshiere Imera, the probability of Zagan or Nephy dropping by town was considerably low. It was far more likely that they didn't even know what the day signified.

Chastille and the other Angelic Knights had their hands full with the festival already. Even if they realized the presence of the undead, it was impossible for them to come rushing into Archdemon Palace. Unable to take a step forward or backward, a hard object then struck

against Kuroka's forepaw. It was Kuroka's sword cane, the Moonless Sky.

It seemed that Shax didn't realize there were two swords concealed within, and Kuroka could tell that the second blade was still in its sheathe. Kuroka stuck out her tongue and gave it a lick.

What exactly will change if I just pray...?

Nevertheless, all she could really do now was pray. She wanted to return to her original form. She wanted to ask Shax about what happened five years ago. She wanted to meet Kuu and the others, who she left in town waiting for her. But what she wanted above all else right now was...

I want...

And just at that time...

"[He who rules over the journey to death.]"

She suddenly heard a song come out of nowhere.

Singing...?

It bore a strong resemblance to Nephteros' singing back when Kuroka had attacked Chastille. Actually, it wasn't just a strong resemblance. It was Nephteros' voice itself. It seemed that Nephy's voice was mixed in as well.

Why can I hear it here...?

Kuroka was currently deep underground. The light of day had no way of reaching her, and there was no way sound from above could do so either. But curiously enough, she could tell that this was their song.

It's the same as back then.

Back when she tried to get revenge for her adoptive father Raphael and failed, she heard this song. Even as she cried, even as she suffered, Nephteros prayed for the safety of her friend, and this emotion was passed to Kuroka. That's why she was once more able to grip her sword.

And that's when Kuroka realized. The singing was reverberating from her sword.

I see. You've always been with me, huh?

Even in the depths of despair, even when she went down the wrong path, even when she lost her sight, even when she lost Raphael, these swords were what gave her the power to walk on at all times.

Kuroka gave the sword another lick.

"Will you lend me your power once more, Moonless Sky? I need to go save the one wielding your other half."

She really did want to ask him the truth of what happened five years ago. But what she had to accomplish right now, what was far more important, was returning her debt to the awkward sorcerer who carried Kuroka, continued to protect her, and refused to abandon her

in her time of need, unable to even walk on her own.

I don't just have to, I want to!

She held out her hand, and mysteriously felt like she could grip her sword. And in the next instant, she was already dashing.

"Oh dear, what an impatient girl. A lady shouldn't run about in that state of dress, you know...?"

She didn't even notice the girl muttering helplessly behind her.



"Huh...? Am I screwed here?"

Shax was putting in more effort than he thought he was capable of. He somehow or other managed to hold back the flood of undead using shoddy sorcery, a short sword, and some awful tricks.

However, each corpse simply gave birth to another undead. It used up all his strength just to endure the first wave, and now he had his back pressed against the door and was just barely able to look up. He didn't have the strength to stand anymore.

He then spotted a familiar face among the endless wave of undead. It was a young woman with ears akin to a cat atop her head.

"You were... in that village five years ago...?"

It was the woman who had entrusted the lone survivor to Shax.

That means all of these undead were the ones killed by Shere Khan...?

If that were the case, this was all done in rather repulsive taste. The title of Tiger King wasn't just for show.

"Kuro...ka... my... cute... Kuroka..."

The woman repeated the same thing over and over in a delirium. It was likely the name of the girl she handed to Shax that day.

Huh? Kuroka? Where did I hear that name before...?

The undead came rushing in before Shax could find the answer. Even if he wanted to run away, his legs couldn't move anymore.

"Man... I really shouldn't do things out of character, huh...?"

A small-time sorcerer like Shax trying so hard to protect someone else could only be on a one-way road to death. It wouldn't even serve as any form of repentance if he managed to protect this one cat. And just at that time...

"[He who blows over the reeds, and passes wisdom to man.]"

He suddenly heard a song out of nowhere, and the inside of his hand became hot. The source of the heat was the short sword he was gripping.

That little missy told me to return this to its owner, right?

He didn't have any way of returning something to someone he didn't even know in the first place. The only choice was to have her give up, having chosen the wrong person to deliver the goods.

"Tch... Crap, isn't this bad?"

If these were the people killed by Shere Khan, it meant that they

were possibly targeting the girl who had survived back then. Alshiera seemed to be hinting at that as well.

“...Oh well. Guess I’ve gotta struggle just a bit more.”

He didn’t believe that he could atone by doing so. Nevertheless, it made him remember. His own life was worthless, but it wasn’t something he could just throw away here.

If I’m gonna get killed anyway, I should get killed by the brat from back then.

If they met, she would surely throw so much disparagement at him that she would run out of things to say. And in the height of her anger, she would kill him.

But, that’s the way it should be.

That was surely what this short sword was for. And after avenging the fallen, the child from back then would be able to face forward and live her life. In that moment, Shax would finally be able to repent for the very first time.

That’s why he had to stand his ground. If he were to die here, he would have to repent for the vampire... well, for the cat behind him at least. And just as he mustered his will power...

“Whoa?!”

The door Shax had pressed against his back was kicked down, and the short sword in his hand was sent flying away.

Why am I so damn unlucky...?

To think that he would face such a sloppy death right at the very end. Shax chased the hilt of the sword which left his hand with his eyes, and spotted a pure white hand grabbing it.

“Huh...?”

It was a girl in a black dress. But not Alshiera. It was the same dress, but the girl wasn’t Alshiera. She had triangular cat ears atop her head. But she also had human ears on the side of her head. It was a four ears tabaxi girl. She had another short sword in her other hand, and both of them were giving off a blinding light like a Sacred Sword.

She mowed down the undead plunging down on her from straight above with the short sword in her left hand, then thrust forth the short sword she caught in her right hand into another undead’s neck.

You dumbass! The sword’ll get stuck like that!

Ignoring Shax’s concerns, the girl twisted her body and span in a circle. The sword smoothly slipped through the neck of the undead without pressuring the flat of the blade and lunged at its next target like a snake.

The girl continued to trample down the undead with each step she took forward, as if the swords were already a part of her body. Her dress fluttered in the air with every undead struck down, as if she was dancing.



She's strong.

She was on par with... or perhaps even beyond Zagan's butler Raphael as well as the Archangel Chastille. Not only that, each undead she struck down began to slowly dissolve away. Even when the wounds she dealt were nowhere close to fatal, the undead were being annihilated. Moreover, the next undead didn't come crawling out of the newly made corpses.

The sword didn't display anywhere near the same amount of power in Shax's hand. Perhaps it was because both swords had to be wielded together, or perhaps this girl was their original owner. And finally, all the dots began to connect in Shax's head.

Oh yeah. I heard there was a tabaxi priest at the church wasn't there?

She wasn't an Angelic Knight, but for some reason there was an order out from Zagan that she was a vital target to be kept safe. She was a cait sith from Liucaon, who also happened to be blind, named Kuroka Adelhide. Shax interpreted this order as a command not to make trouble, so he only ever spotted her from a distance.

"She's been so near to you all this time."

He finally understood the meaning of Alshiera's words. It wasn't all that complicated. The girl he picked up five years ago was thrown into the church, and she ended up at the church in the same town that he was in.

A woman with cat ears then stood before the girl who was cutting down the undead like a black tempest. This was the woman who had handed her daughter to Shax five years ago. And knowing full well who she was, the girl grit her teeth.

"Mom...!"

Watching the girl swing her short sword at the woman, Shax jumped out before he even knew it.

"Huh?"

The killing blow pitifully missed its target. Shax had grabbed the girl from behind. Her dignified dancing came to a complete stop, and the girl began yelling in confusion.

"Hwah? Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What's going on?"

"Sorry, that's my duty."

Killing your own parent is something only worthless scum like me would do.

Even if they weren't alive anymore. In any case, Shax had already accumulated a mountain of sins. Nobody would be troubled if he added one more to the list.

The boss could probably do something about it without killing anyone, though...

Several months ago, during an evening ball on a boat, that

Archdemon showed that he could save the dark elf girl who was pitifully made to be a sacrifice by her master. However, a mediocre sorcerer like Shax had no other choice but to kill. And just as he gathered his mana around his hand to go for the killing blow...

“Good work watching the house.”

The woman was blown away with a large thud. Taking a closer look, an iron coffin flew into her. As it did, the inscription engraved on the lid came into sight.

In celebration of my dear sister's birthday, Alshiere Imera.

It was something unthinkable to carve onto a coffin, but for some reason it felt completely natural.

The shock knocked over the lid of the coffin, and what looked like two iron boxes fell out. They were thin and about the same length of a grown man's forearms. One side of each box had what looked like a crossbow's grip, and the other side had a hole in the tip about the size of a finger drilled into it. The grips even had what looked like a trigger mechanism, so at a glance they really did resemble crossbows, but there was no visible mechanism for loading bolts or the like.

It was a mysterious tool, but Shax had seen this weapon before.

There's no mistaking it. That's...!

A slender hand grabbed each one. It was Alshiera. If her arms only possessed as much strength as they appeared to, it would be questionable whether she would be able to lift one with both hands. Yet here she was with one in each.

“Good day to you, Stern, Mond, my dear Seraph Hunters. How does it feel to awaken?”

The young girl leisurely said, as she held ‘those’ up and gave them a kiss. And as she did, the path toward them overflowed with the undead. Kuroka's skills were terrifying, but the speed with which the undead poured in was even more terrifying. Moreover, since Shax got in the way, they had already replenished the numbers that she'd struck down.

Alshiera faced the oncoming flood and held her two iron pieces out toward them. Seeing that gave Shax chills.

“Get down!”

“Eek!”

Shax pulled Kuroka down before she could parse what he was saying. And Alshiera pulled the trigger.

Shax knew full well that those lumps of iron, the Seraph Hunters, fired out small projectiles. They were far faster than arrows or bolts, and could not even be perceived by a sorcerer's eyes such was their speed. The undead, of course, had no way of recognizing this at all, and two holes opened up in the vanguard.

Darkness flickered at the center of the pitiful undead who were

struck. Dark globes broke out along with the sound of something being crushed. The globes were large enough that the two of them could cover the entire passage from the archives to the graveyard.

They spread out for but an instant, and after vanishing, nothing was left behind. The walls and bedrock that they touched were bored out like a mortar, and the undead that were previously in that space were nowhere to be found.

What was even more terrifying though, were the undead who were not completely swallowed. They were just like the walls and bedrock in that only the portions that were touched by the globes were gouged out, but there was no blood coming from their wounds, they just crumbled away like rotting wood.

“It’s the same as five years ago...”

It was the power used by the young man whose name he didn’t even know. Even Archdemon Shere Khan was completely powerless and butchered by this destructive force and speed that far surpassed human understanding.

It’s the same as Zagan’s Heaven’s Phosphor.

It was a forbidden spell which could even burn the Sludge Demon Lord Shax saw at the Archdemon’s evening ball to ash. Moreover, Alshiera’s weapons completely overcame the defects when it came to range, area of effect, and penetrative power. The only ones who could even understand what was even going on here were Shax and Alshiera. Setting aside the undead, Kuroka had completely stiffened up in astonishment.

Alshiera pulled the triggers of her Seraph Hunters once more. Small explosions broke out within the iron boxes and spherical black projectiles came flying out. At the same time, the top portion of the iron boxes slid backward as smoke came fuming out the hole in the tips.

Watching it for the second time, Shax could see that it wasn’t just bullets and smoke being ejected from the weapons, but there was also a small cylindrical tube being thrown out the back. The tubes were dizzyingly packed with intricately detailed spells and magic circles.

The projectiles once more struck the wall of undead, the globes of darkness broke out again, and the second wave perished. It wasn’t clear whether they even possessed the concept of fear, but it seemed they were cognizant of the weapons being pointed at them.

“Gyih!”

One of them let out a scream, and the undead turned around and ran as if roused by that one scream. But it wasn’t like Alshiera was doing nothing while firing her second volley. Bat-like wings made of shadows pierced out of her back. The wings split apart into what looked like threads, ran along the walls and floors and spread out at

the feet of the escaping undead. The shadowy threads looked like some sort of spider web the more it spread out.

“Oh, how pitiful... Alas, I cannot allow you to escape.”

With that, black chains and stakes shot out of the shadowy spider web.

“Gyaah!”

The undead pierced by the stakes and chains became stuck in place and served as obstructions to the others. Nevertheless, the escaping horde showed no signs of stopping, and trampled and tripped over each other.

They were far too defenseless. The vampire let out her third volley of fire, and the escaping undead were forever erased from the world.

She's really damn used to fighting.

It was entirely possible that the chains shooting out of the shadows were a mechanism to amplify the effect of the Seraph Hunters. Nevertheless, she only fired three times. And in just three volleys, half of the undead were annihilated.

Can she just fire those indefinitely if she feels like it?

If so, this was a destructive force that even surpassed Zagan's Heaven's Phosphor. It could surely even destroy the monster at the evening ball with ease. But at the same time, a certain doubt came to mind.

Do monsters that require this sort of power to defeat even exist in this world?

Yet, as he contemplated that, Alshiera suddenly turned pale.

“Oh...? How troublesome. My dear brother, you really did treat these far too roughly, didn't you?”

Taking a closer look, the sliding portion on the iron boxes were stuck back and weren't moving anymore.

“Just three shots? To think there weren't any bullets left...”

Judging from what she said, there was a reason the weapons couldn't be used anymore.

“Wh-What now?!”

“Oh dear, is this not the time for a gentleman to step forth with resolution?”

The undead noticed that the next attack wasn't coming, and once more rushed in toward Alshiera. She resorted to using the sides of the Seraph Hunters to bash them in the face. Even without their powers, they were still sturdy lumps of iron. The undead struck by the weapons had their jaws and faces mercilessly pulverized and were sent flying into the air.

They likely perished before even falling back down atop the horde behind them. And with corpses falling on them from above, the undead began tumbling over.

Alshiera swung her arm in the air while still gripping the Seraph Hunters, and shadowy wings once more spread out from her back, piercing the undead and bringing them to a stop.

However, these undead would keep crawling out as long as their bodies weren't completely annihilated. Even if they were restrained with chains, the next would come crawling out. And after handling the second, then the third wave, they were beginning to overtake Alshiera. One of the undead crawling across the ground managed to grab her leg.

Kuroka began squirming out of Shax's arms.

"Please let me go! She can't do this alone—"

"It's gonna be alright now."

Shax began brushing Kuroka's head to calm her down. Yes, everything was alright now. Lights like powdered snow had wrapped themselves around the flood of undead pouring in toward Alshiera.

"Heaven's Phosphor Will O' the Wisp."

The frenzied undead who were leaping in all suddenly turned to ash and crumbled away. An annoyed voice then rang out in the room.

"Goddammit, you've sure brought a huge pain to my door here. I'd have killed you already if Kimaris didn't plead for your damned life."

The Archdemon was standing there with his arms arrogantly folded before him, accompanied by a giant sorcerer with the face of a lion.

"Mister...?"

Kuroka finally realized that this was Zagan, and mumbled in relief. Upon seeing her, Zagan's expression also softened up in relief.

How unexpected. Never thought the boss would look like that for anyone but his bride.

After awkwardly scratching his head, Zagan hesitantly stretched out his hand to Alshiera, who had fallen down.

"...But, how do I put it... You have my thanks for protecting Kuroka and my subordinate."

"Oh my, gratitude from the Silver-Eyed King. I'm honored."

The vampire took the Archdemon's hand with nowhere near as much dissatisfaction as she was letting on. And before they knew it, the song that had guided Kuroka and given Shax a push had come to a stop.



Just a little earlier.

"Okay! Let's confirm it one more time!"

Stella put her hands to her waist and shouted out triumphantly.

It may be somewhat imprudent of me, but Miss Stella certainly looks happy.

Nephy found this to be quite charming as she nodded in reply.

“Yes. Please do, Miss Stella.”

“Mrrr, how stiff. You’re Zagan’s girl aren’t you? Just call me Big Sis!”

“Umm... very well, Stella.”

“Big Sis?”

“Stella....”

“Big Sis!”

“...Understood... Big Sis.”

Nephy lost to her tremendous smile.

“Okay! Let’s get back on track. First I’ll look for the culprit. Then the ominous boy there will open a path.”

“Hah? My face ain’t as evil as that ass Zagan’s, at least.”

“...What?”

Stella glared at Barbatos with a look that could even make Decarabia beg for mercy.

“N-Nothing! All I gotta do is open the shadow, right?” Barbatos flinched back.

“Mhm. And then Nephy and her little sister will give him a big ole walloping.”

“I’ll do my best!”

“Well, it’ll work out one way or another.”

Nephy and Nephteros nodded in reply. Stella then pointed to Gremory.

“And at the same time, you’ll link with my artificial eye and turn the threads of mana to ash!”

Gremory and Barbatos had completed the sorcery to share Stella’s vision in under half an hour. With that, they also succeeded in transmitting Balor’s Evil Eye to target the mana revealed by the King’s Silver Eye.

“Keehee, all the love power we managed to build up here will be lost if the festival is ruined. This cannot be allowed to pass!”

“You’re right. Peeping... I mean, love stories are sweets for a maiden’s ears.”

Gremory looked astonished at Stella coming to some unreasonably deep understanding.

“How unexpected. I feel like we have a lot to talk about!”

“Yeah! Somehow I feel like we’ll get along great!”

“Keehee, I see, there is a comrade that I must introduce you to. Come along with me later.”

The two sorcerers shared a firm handshake to affirm their newfound friendship. The scene would surely give Zagan stomach pains were he to see it. And finally, Stella pointed to Chastille.

“And last, the Angelic Knight girl!”

“M-Me?!”

“This isn’t really something we should be doing in the middle of town. We’re all gonna be totally defenseless. So protect us!”

In a sense, this was a large scale ritual being done by several famous sorcerers. It was typically something that required for more meticulous preparations and wouldn’t be done in the middle of the streets. It was inevitable that they needed some means of protecting themselves.

Chastille was completely overcome with emotions and moved to tears.

“W-Will I really be useful?”

“Mhm. We’re counting on you. I kinda remember you cutting off my arm with amazing vigor. So it’ll totally be okay leaving it to you!”

“...Um, should I apologize for that?”

Chastille strained a smile, unsure whether she was being encouraged or whether she was being criticized.

Strangely enough, everyone present was assigned an important role in the task at hand. Rather, it was impossible if it were anybody else. This ritual couldn’t be done without these six exact members.

But, I’m surprised we could all gather together so conveniently...?

Nephy held suspicions as to whether this was all orchestrated, but everyone here truly did gather together by coincidence or just by the natural flow of events. Nephy wanted to buy Zagan a present. Nephteros and Chastille wanted to help her. Barbatos tagged along while watching Chastille. Gremory sacrificed her body so that Nephy and Zagan would not bump into each other. And Stella just happened to drop by aimlessly and bumped into Nephy.

It was impossible even for a god to manipulate this group of powerful individuals in such a way. In short, this was the result of an unbelievable amount of good fortune, a miracle. After confirming everybody’s roles, aside from the spectators Kuu and Lisette, Stella thrust her fist into the air.

“Okay! Let’s all do our best to hand out some punishment!”

““Yeah!””

The only ones to play along with her were Kuu and Lisette, but Stella looked satisfied nonetheless. She closed her left eye and brushed back her bangs. Barbatos then spread open a shadow.

Next is our turn.

As Nephy’s body stiffened up from the tension as she waited for her signal, Gremory whispered in her ear.

“I must thank you for earlier.”

“...? Did I do something?”

Nothing in particular came to mind and Nephy cocked her head to the side.

“You stopped me when I was about to run off on my own just now, right?” Gremory replied with an unusual air of embarrassment about her. “I would have lost my chance to enjoy the festival.”

“Oh. That?” Nephy replied with a smile. “I’m sure that Sir Kimaris is alright. I believe that he is strong in both body and soul. He will surely return to your side, Miss Gremory.”

“M-Mrr...”

Gremory’s cheeks turned red as she averted her gaze, unable to say anything back.

I see. I certainly do feel like I want to watch over their future from afar.

This was likely what Stella called ‘sweets for a maiden’s ears.’ Nephy unintentionally grinned, leading Gremory to stiffen up in fear.

“You’re somewhat scary, Lady Nephy...”

And just then, Barbatos called out to her.

“Right on! We got him! Give him hell!”

Nephy and Nephteros exchanged nods.

“[He who rules over the journey to death.]”

“[He who blows over the reeds, and passes wisdom to man.]”

The two sisters sang in chorus as mana gathered around them like fireflies.

“So pretty...” Lisette muttered in fascination.

Guided by Nephteros’ voice, Nephy could naturally grasp what song she should be singing.

“[The golden bridge runs a thousand miles for but this instant, and the serpent’s staff shall bring forth news of prosperity and ruin.]

“[The reeds are tempted to an eternal slumber. Such is the divine scythe whose might can even reap the progenitor.]”

It was their first duet, but they sang in perfect harmony. However, an eerie shadow began crawling out beneath the dancing lights.

“Shine — Azrael!”

Chastille’s Sacred Sword cut down whatever was crawling out before it could even reveal itself. There was far more than one of them, but to the Archangel extolled as the fastest, they were all perfectly still targets. Every single one of them was cut down within seconds.

““[Even if seen by hundreds of eyes, even if thousands rebelled against the eternal slumber, even if millions attempted to flee over the horizon, even if guarded by the wisdom of billions, it comes for all creation.]””

Their songs melted together, and reverberated far into the distance through the shadow Barbatos opened, following the path of mana that Stella was tracing. It didn’t give birth to untold destruction, but was like a ripple spreading across a quiet lake. Nephy and

Nephteros put their foreheads together, and the two high elf sisters sang the final verse.

““[Such is the flute’s melody which slaughters the masses] —
Algea Pathi!””

The gentle ripple was reversed. The silent stream suddenly became a rampaging avalanche. It was like a tempest of mana possessing a will. If it was invoked here in this place, it was entirely possible that it could swallow the entirety of Kianoides.

But that’s not where it’s being fired!

Nephteros was invoking it on the other side of Barbatos’ shadow. And just as their celestial mysticism activated, Gremory’s eyes let out a golden glow.

“Turn to ash — Balor’s Evil Eye!”

This is everything we’re capable of!

She definitely felt a response. Nephy looked to Nephteros, who nodded with a smile. Their celestial mysticism hit the mark.

Silence.

Though they could feel the response of their attack succeeding, they had no way of verifying whether it finished off their target. They could hear neither the sound of destruction nor their enemy’s screams, after all.

“Is it over...?”

Lisette mumbled anxiously. Nephy didn’t possess the answer herself, and was somewhat bewildered as well.

Just then, something like debris came tumbling down from the clear skies. But it wasn’t debris...

“Huh? It’s snow...”

The first to realize this was Kuu. Gremory’s evil eye was supposed to turn its target into ash. There were no clouds in the sky too, so where was the snow coming from? Finding this rather curious, Nephteros muttered in admiration.

“I see. It’s the cold. The ash created by Gremory’s evil eye gathered the moisture in the air and turned into snow.”

“What do you mean?”

“Snow is the crystallization of water vapor getting affixed to debris in the atmosphere. There’s no mistaking this is a byproduct of sorcery, but it’s quite amusing that this happened without any intention to do so.”

It may just have been a perfectly appropriate spectacle to pull down the curtain on their quiet incident.

“Indeed, it’s beautiful.”

The two sisters stood side by side and looked up at the snow on this sunny day.



“Mom...”

Back at Archdemon Palace. Almost all of the undead were obliterated by Zagan and Alshiera, but there was still a single survivor left. The undead which was Kuroka’s mother. Perhaps as a blessing in disguise, or perhaps in a turn of misfortune, she was thrown out of range of all the attacks due to being struck by the coffin Alshiera threw. Kuroka had her Moonless Sky stabbed into the ground next to her, forming a simple barrier to prevent any new undead from crawling out.

It was entirely possible that this was all calculated by Alshiera beforehand. Even so, it was an attack from a vampire who could pulverize the human body with a simple blow. She was still breathing, or perhaps it was better to say she was still maintaining her existence, but it wouldn’t last much longer.

Furthermore, she was just staring blankly into space while muttering meaningless groans. Kuroka definitely heard her mother say her name, but in the end, she didn’t seem to possess an ego, just like all the other undead.

Kuroka timidly stretched out her hand to her mother’s face. First her middle finger, then her ring finger, her index finger, her pinky, and finally her thumb came in contact, verifying the contours of her mother’s face. Nothing had changed from her memory of her mother from five years ago, a face frozen in time. However, her face was dead cold. She could tell full well that her mother was no longer alive.

Her mother’s lips then trembled faintly.

Is she trying to say something?

Kuroka brought her face closer.

“Mom! It’s Kuroka. I’m right here.”

She called out to her mother earnestly, but no words left her mother’s lips. Would her mother curse the name of the one who killed her? Or perhaps they would be words searching for a survivor other than Kuroka? Or even, were they words for one of her people that were also turned into the undead?

These were to be her final words on the verge of death. They absolutely couldn’t be left unheard by Kuroka.

Yet... I can’t... hear them...

Thanks to Zagan and Lilith, Kuroka was finally able to touch the faces of others. She was able to distinguish people by their faces.

But... I’m too late...

Kuroka couldn’t receive her mother’s final words. If only she gathered her courage earlier and had her eyes healed. If she could see, it was possible for her to read her mother’s lips. If she could do that, she could answer her mother’s wish.

“Sorry... Mom... I can’t...”

See you off to the end. Just as she was about to say those words in tears...

“Close your eyes for a sec.”

Shax, whose name she just heard from Zagan, called out to her. Kuroka didn’t know what he was saying at such a time, but she did as he said and closed her eyes. It didn’t change a thing, all she could see was a world without light, it didn’t matter whether her eyes were open or closed.

“Hwah?!”

As she did, Shax pinned her head as if covering her human ears and began muttering something. It seemed he was putting some sort of sorcery to use, and it felt like something akin to water was pouring into her head through her ears.

A shiver ran down her spine, and Kuroka tried her best not to make any weird noises. Before long, his short chant came to an end, and Shax spoke quietly to her with his hands still on her ears.

“Okay. Try opening your eyes.”

Kuroka slowly opened her eyes. And then, a crack of light poured into her colorless world.

“Huh?”

The growing crevice was filled with color. What seemed like a blinding light turned dim, and took on the shape of an ashen stone floor. And lying in the center of the floor was her mother, wearing the robe of a sorcerer. Her mother’s eyes were hollow, but they were certainly pointed toward Kuroka.

Kuroka understood that this was the world she couldn’t normally see, but she needed a few seconds to collect herself. Even in absolute confusion, she came to her senses upon seeing her mother’s lips move. What kind of miracle allowed her eyes to reflect the outside world?

But that didn’t matter, she wouldn’t let this pass. Back in her early days at Azazel, she was taught how to read lips.

K-u-r-o-k-a.

She could tell that her mother was calling her name.

“Yes. I’m right here! Mom!”

As Kuroka grabbed her hand, her mother’s expression seemed to soften up.

Y-o-u-v-e-b-e-c-o-m-e-s-o-p-r-e-t-t-y.

What came out of her mouth were not words of regret from being killed, nor were they words of resentment from being toyed with and turned into the undead. They were words of joy at her daughter’s growth over these five years.

“A-Ah...”

Tears began pouring down Kuroka’s cheeks.

I’m doing great. I’m properly living my life now. I love you, mom. I’m

happy to see you, even like this. I've been saved by so many people.

Even though she had a mountain of things she wanted to tell her mother, Kuroka's voice wouldn't come out. Yet her mother smiled happily back at her, as if she had heard them all.

B-e-h-a-p-p-y.

Those were the last words from her mother. Her body crumbled away like dust, and as Kuroka blinked, all that was left was ash.

“A-Ah... Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”



Kuroka cried out. Why couldn't she say she was happy? Why couldn't she at least thank her? No matter how much she grieved and tormented herself over this, there was no way she would come to an answer.

"Don't cry!"

Kuroka trembled with a start from being yelled at suddenly from behind.

"Your mom just told you to be happy, right? You gonna see her off with tears?"

"..."

Kuroka mysteriously felt like all her confused emotions settled down from being scolded like that. She wiped away her tears, but not even a fragment of her mother's body remained anymore. No matter how much she screamed, nothing would reach her mother anymore.

But, she was here.

Kuroka took a short breath in, then out. She calmed herself down, and faced where her mother was.

"Mom. Thank you... and goodbye."

A refreshing breeze blew through what was supposed to be a sealed corridor. Kuroka felt like the wind was carrying her mother away somewhere peaceful, and gazed off into the distance. She didn't even know how long she was doing so, and before long, the light once more vanished from her sight.

"Huh?"

Before she could even understand what was going on, someone leaned on her from behind.

"Hwawawa..."

Just as she felt like she was about to be toppled over, someone lifted up the man who was falling on her by the neck.

"You fool. Let go before losing consciousness will you...?"

"...Oh. Sorry boss."

Zagan had apparently cut in.

"But, well done. I was told to come check up on her, but it nearly got to the point where I couldn't even face Raphael anymore." He said in an unexpectedly relived voice.

Kuroka brought her hand up in front of her face. She couldn't see anything, regardless of how dark the area was. Nothing was reflected in her eyes. It was the same as before, a world with no light.

What was that just now?

Kuroka stood there dumbfounded for a while, as Shax then called out to her apologetically.

"Sorry missy. I didn't fix your eyes or anything just now. I directly overwrote your memories to your brain by bypassing the optic nerves

and... well, I guess you won't really get it like that. Anyway, I made it so you could temporarily see what was going on."

But Kuroka knew that this sorcerer said he couldn't heal her back when she was a cat. In other words, there wasn't a means of healing her at the time. And yet, even if just for a moment, she was able to see the outside world. That meant that he had searched for a means to do so.

Shax awkwardly scratched at his cheek.

"This sorcery is kinda just at the theoretical phase, it's not even really experimental yet. I kinda gambled on whether it would work out, but looks like it functioned properly, huh? That's a relief."

The reason he was about to collapse was because he was trying to use such an incomplete sorcery.

This person went so far and kept silent just so to show me the outside world?

She was able to properly see her mother off. It would have been fine for him to undo his sorcery at that point, but he didn't. He stayed still and maintained it until Kuroka calmed down.

What an awkward person...

At the same time, it was rather unfortunate that she wasn't able to see his face after finally being able to see the light. Kuroka neatly straightened her posture and put her hands on her knees with a bow.

"Um, thank you very much. How do I put it... for all sorts of things..."

Even if she was a cat, the thought of her being carried around by this man all this time made her shy, and she could feel herself blushing. Shax's reply however was completely unexpected.

"Uhhh, don't worry about it. I made it to try and help Blacky in the first place. Sorry for using you as a guinea pig. I'm the one who should be thanking you."

"Huh...?"

It felt like they were talking on parallel lines. Kuroka cocked her head to the side, and Shax turned to Alshiera.

"Anyway, is Blacky still in that room? She's probably all scared from not being able to see."

"...I have no idea what you're talking about here?"

"Wuh? I mean, I gave you a black cat, right? Where'd she...? Ow!"

It seemed that even Zagan was completely thrown off by this and dropped Shax. Zagan then turned to his other subordinate.

"Hey Kimaris. I thought you said this guy's been with Kuroka all this time?"

"Ummm... Yes. That was supposed to be the case..."

Their voices were both completely bewildered. Kuroka could tell that the great Archdemon's face was clouded over with a 'Huh? What

do we do about this?’ look plastered on his face, and the sorcerer next to him had his mouth open in shock.

Kuroka herself was likely making the same expression. Though in her case, far too much had happened to her today, and it felt like all her thoughts had come to a stop. The only one who could properly react here was Alshiera.

“...You may not believe me, but I tried my best, you know? I made it as easy to understand as I could, you know?”

“Ah... Mm. Sorry. My subordinate is really just... um... sorry.”

It was unheard of to hear an Archdemon apologize to another.

“Hey, what are you saying boss? I don’t really get it, but whatever, I need to excuse myself. I gotta look for Blacky.”

And still walking on a parallel line, the useless sorcerer left the corridor.

What a hopeless person...

Even though Kuroka thought so little of him, she smiled.

“Heehee...”

And even with all this going on, Kuroka giggled.



“...Defeated...”

He wrung out his voice in complete darkness. Not only was his trump card, the army of undead, completely obliterated, even his base was totally destroyed. It would be impossible to send another army of undead to do his bidding. It was only possible to do so in the first place because of what day it was.

This was the day of the rebirth of the world’s one and only girl who had truly returned from the dead, the little sister of the nameless god that the church revered, Alshiere Imera. He bet on his victory precisely because this was a day where the boundary between the living and the dead was vague.

And he was defeated. Even though he was too fixated on Alshiera, he never thought that his base would be directly attacked by sorcery... no, celestial mysticism. He had no way of defending against it. If he took a direct hit, he surely wouldn’t even have left cinders behind. Nevertheless, he survived.

“Ahahahaa, that sure was close, huh, Shere Khan? That was celestial mysticism. You’d be dead if I wasn’t here, you know?”

A voice which couldn’t be identified as a boy’s or a girl’s reverberated in the air. And the one to speak had a Sigil of the Archdemon on their right hand.

“Hehehe, senior citizens deserve pity. The young ones these days don’t know how to hold back at all. Don’t you think so too, Shere Khan?”

He didn’t understand what was so funny, but the owner of the

laughing voice began walking and pushing on his wheelchair.

“What... do you... want...?”

An Archdemon of all people would never save someone for free. The owner of the laughing voice stopped pushing his wheelchair, and opened their shirt to show their chest.

“It’s not all that big a deal. I’ve got just a slightly troublesome curse cast on me you see? I want your help in dispelling it. You can do it, right?”

A terrifying spell was placed on the childish chest before him. It was the same kind of power as the Seraph Hunters that had reduced him to his current state. Precisely because he had survived it, he certainly did possess a means of breaking the spell. If he were to refuse, this Archdemon would surely kill him without hesitation. However, he still had his doubts.

“Why... so rushed... to dispel it...?”

The Archdemon likely had a reason to push their demands on him so unilaterally. But, it didn’t change the fact that they were exposing their weakness to him. Given time, this Archdemon surely possessed the ability to dispel the curse themselves. Nevertheless, they shamelessly came to save him and requested his aid. That meant they were in a hurry.

“A filthy maggot has gotten attached to my cute little doll.” The childish Archdemon said with a twisted smile. “And this here’s stopping me from crushing them.”

Surprisingly, he sensed anger from the Archdemon.

To think the emotion of anger would still exist in one called an Archdemon...

Was this because this Archdemon was the youngest right behind Zagan? Or was there another reason for it? Nevertheless, he was able of sympathizing with such a reason.

“Very... well... I shall... lend you... my strength...”

And just in the same way that Zagan was beginning to form bonds with other Archdemons, an abominable alliance between Archdemons was being formed right here.

Epilogue

“Welcome home, Daddy.”

Upon returning to the castle, Zagan found that a brilliant party had begun. The once abandoned castle was now decorated with colored paper ornaments, golden bells and the like. The castle was steadily being restored ever since Nephy arrived, but it was nearly unrecognizable now. The garden had a table set up with a pure white cloth covering it, where a lineup of savory-looking food was prepared.

By the time the incident in town had concluded, the sun was in the middle of setting. Giving up on meeting back up with Gremory, Zagan took Kimaris, Kuroka, and while he was at it, Shax and even Alshiera, though he didn't want to actually invite her, he just had things he had to ask... and returned to the castle by nighttime, where the party was waiting for him.

“Wh-What's with all this?”

“It's Alshiere Imera today.”

And once more, it was about Alshiera Imera. Even though he was told not to pry into it for the whole day, he couldn't hold back his curiosity.

“What exactly is this Alshiere Imera?”

And Foll smiled, as if waiting for that exact question.

“Alshiere Imera is a festival where you give present to the people you love. So I'm having a party for Zagan and Nephy.”

Zagan's eyes became hot. He had heard it was a day where one gave presents to their loved ones, but he never thought that he would be on the side receiving anything.

Wait... did that damn Gremory lead me on to think that way?

Thinking back on it, the example she showed him was a man giving a woman a present. He was unconsciously led to believe that the men were on the giving side.

I was wondering what she was hiding from me lately.

Zagan realized that Foll was up to something, even going as far as getting all his subordinates involved. But she showed no signs of brooding over it the way she did when she was seeking power. That's why he decided just to keep quiet and watch over her quietly, but he never thought this would be the outcome.

And looking back on his life, he couldn't even remember an instance of anyone celebrating anything for him. The only thing he

could think of was the day he became an Archdemon, when Nephy congratulated him. Though he ended up hurting her horribly right after that, so it wasn't all that good a memory.

Zagan lowered to a knee and lined up his sight with Foll's, then rubbed her head.

"This is my first time experiencing something like this. It's surprising, but... how do I put it... I'm happy."

"Mm! Thank goodness."

Foll jumped up and hugged him, and Zagan hugged her back. And seeing this scene, for some reason, Raphael and Zagan's other subordinates, who were inexplicably wearing things like red hats and antlers, all pumped their fists in delight.

Zagan scooped Foll up into the air, then took a look around him.

"Oh yeah, where's Nephy? Did she prepare all this with you?"

"Nuh-uh. It was a secret from Nephy too. She's right there."

Foll pointed to the castle gates. Looking closely, Zagan could spot Nephy in the shadow... together with Nephteros and Chastille as well. As his eyes met Nephy's, she timidly came out of the shadows toward him. And upon seeing her, Zagan's eyes shot open in shock.

"What?!"

Nephy was wearing a red outfit with what looked like white cotton decorating it. It was all fluffy and tremendously stimulated his desire to protect her. Nephy herself also appeared to be quite embarrassed, and she came rushing over while covering her face.

"W-Welcome home, M-Master Zagan."

"M-Mm. I'm back, Nephy."

That simple exchange was far too embarrassing for both of them, and they averted their gazes.

"U-Um, th-they really suit you. The clothes, I mean. Your regular clothes are good too! B-But... th-these are really cute! I want to hug you!"

Zagan was far too shaken and ended up rambling. And having that said perfectly straight to her, Nephy turned red right to the very tip of her ears.

"Hwa-wa-waa.... Th-Thank you... v-very... mush..."

Nephteros and Chastille were rushing toward them for a moment, but did an about face with tremendous vigor partway. Not that Zagan even noticed.

Foll then tugged on Nephy's clothes.

"Nephy, don't you have something?"

"Oh! Y-You're right."

Nephy fumbled about and took out a small package from behind her.

"Master Zagan. Though it may be but a trifle, this is an Alshire

Imera present for you. If it pleases you, please accept it.”

“What...?! A present from you?!”

After doing his best to pick out a present himself, Zagan never thought that she would beat him to the punch. And though he found himself disappointed for allowing it to happen, the option of refusing such a gift didn’t exist at all, even if it were to bring the world to ruin.

“I shall accept it. C-Can I open it now?”

“Y-Yes!”

Zagan opened the gift and stared at it in wonder.

“This is...”

It was a long and narrow pipe made of brass. The tip curved upward and contained an opening to place something within. The grip was made of wood and was contoured to fit in one’s fingers snugly.

“It’s a pipe from Liucaon. You seemed to enjoy the tobacco you had back then.”

Not only that...

It’s the one I was interested in while browsing the shop Gremory brought me to.

He didn’t really want to admit it, but it truly was just as Archdemon Andrealphus said. It wasn’t bad at all to have a smoke and blow away all the bad feelings of a battle away. Zagan had gone shopping to buy presents for the others though, so he decided to pick it up another time. And unbelievably enough, Nephy ended up buying it for him.

He was unintentionally just staring at it, as he then realized that Nephy looked a little troubled.

“Um, does it not please you?”

“Unthinkable! It’s perfect. I was just looking at something similar in the store and was troubled over whether to buy it myself. This is great.”

“Oh. Th-Thank goodness.”

Zagan then noticed that Foll was looking up at him from within his arms. It was like she was looking at something adorable, and hugged Zagan’s neck.

“Nephy went out to work in town just to buy this.”

“Huh?! Foll! Why did you tell him?!” Nephy shouted, and Zagan’s eyes shot open once more in astonishment.

Even if she didn’t do so, Nephy was given enough money that she could buy anything she wanted. Nevertheless, the Archdemon wasn’t ignorant enough not to know the meaning behind working secretly to accumulate the money to do so. This was a present that Nephy spent her precious spare time outside of handling household matters to buy, the labor of her own hard work. There was no way he wouldn’t be elated over such a thing.

Hnnngh. A cute outfit and a present. And that embarrassed look at having the hard work she put in for it exposed! How far do you plan on cornering me?!

It was like a four chain combo. Zagan's heart was already beating so hard that it was approaching its very limits. It was entirely possible that his chest would burst open if he were to receive any more joy. As such, Zagan began his counterattack.

"Hear me Nephy! I have also prepared a present!"

And Nephy stared back at him in wonder.

"Were you aware of Alshiere Imera?"

"No, I simply saw a festival going on in town. And I only found out about it today."

Zagan had an ongoing promise with Kimaris. If not for Gremory, he would likely not have even prepared a present either. In that sense, he was saved by that granny this time around. The two girls looked truly relieved at his answer.

"Thank goodness, Master Zagan. Were you surprised?"

Judging by their reaction, he could tell that they wanted to surprise him while assuming that he knew nothing of Alshiere Imera.

Hnngh. What's going on?! I can't stop smiling!

This was why Kimaris had begged him not to pry further into it. If not for that, Zagan would surely have only been able to taste half the joy he was experiencing now. The sheer happiness of the situation brought him to his knees.

"Of course I'm surprised! And happy! Can I hug you now?!"

"...Master Zagan, that's embarrassing."

"I thought you would say that," Foll quipped.

In contrast to his blushing bride who was now covering her face, his daughter threw up both her arms in joy.

What's this? I feel like I'm getting a tepid look from my daughter here.

He then realized that he hadn't yet handed over any presents, and pulled one out of his pocket.

"O-Oh yeah. Nephy. Will you take this?"

"Yes?"

Zagan handed over a white package, and Nephy's pointy ears turned markedly red right to their tips.



“U-Um, may I open it?”

“Of course.”

Zagan was relieved to see her so plainly excited.

I get it. I must've been making the same reaction.

This was her reaction from just one surprise. Just what kind of expression would she make from a four chain combo? Zagan calmly observed her for but a moment, but then remembered that it had just happened to him and lost his composure once more.

Nephy opened the lid of the box and pulled out soft gloves.

“This is...”

“I-It’s gotten cold lately. It’s also woven with sorcery to constantly heal your hands. Once winter comes along, even just touching water can harm your skin, after all.”

Nephy was capable of such sorcery herself, but you couldn’t really say that was a means of caring for one’s skin. That’s why Zagan was in a hurry to weave his sorcery into it while returning to the castle.

“...Th-Thank you very much!”

Zagan was fixated on the looks, so the gloves weren’t all that expensive, but Nephy held them close to her chest affectionately nonetheless.

He then shifted his focus over to Foll.

“And this one’s for you.”

“Me too?”

“Yeah. As thanks for holding a party.”

Foll’s present was a pair of jade earrings carved to look like a dragon’s scales. Shining a light through it revealed a rainbow-like brilliance.

“So pretty... Thanks.”

Zagan then put the earrings on his daughter, who was honestly quite pleased with her gift. And around this time, Nephteros and the others finally approached him.

“Can we join in now, Big Bro?”

“Hm? Oh, my bad. It seems I acted somewhat out of character.”

“...You may be planning on acting all majestic here, but you’ve got a huge smile on your face.”

And his bravado was a complete failure. He then noticed that his sister-in-law was wearing the same outfit as Nephy.

“Mm. It suits you as well. Do people wear such clothing for Alshire Imera?”

“There’s a fairy called Tonto who hands out presents to children. It’s apparently modeled after him.”

“Oh, I get it now...”

Apparently the waifs in the alleys sympathized with Zagan

because he knew nothing of this. Chastille then also approached him from behind Nephteros.

“Aren’t you glad he praised you, Nephteros?”

“...Geez. I’m telling you it’s not really like that or anything.”

The tips of Nephteros’ ears turned red as she writhed about, either out of happiness or embarrassment.

Hmm... I guess it feels like she’s happy about having friends.

His sister-in-law did more or less have a suitor after her, but seeing her reaction toward Chastille, it felt like she treated having a family and friends more precious than that.

Chastille then picked at her own clothing with a troubled expression.

“Barbatos was a disgrace on the other hand. Well, I guess a sorcerer can’t really understand a church festival or anything.”

“A disgrace? Did he say something again?”

“...For some reason he turned bright red and got super angry.”

“Bright red? Doesn’t that mean...” Zagan was about to guess at what was going on, when Nephy stopped him by crossing her hands in front of her mouth. “Oh, mmm... Anyway, you should probably talk it out properly with him. We had a bit of an incident in town today, so he might have been all worked up.”

“Was he that admirable a man to begin with...?”

What a pain in the ass these two are...

It was amazing how little they understood each other while being attracted at the same time. Zagan was left dumbfounded, and Nephy clapped her hands together to change the topic.

“Um, Chastille, isn’t it about time now?”

“Oh, you’re right. I came here just for that too.”

Chastille thoughtlessly blurted out, then covered her mouth.

“What? There’s more?”

Zagan cocked his head to the side, as Chastille then turned toward the castle and beckoned someone over. Looking over that way, Zagan froze up completely.

“Hey, ahahah. I ended up tagging along.”

“Stella?”

It was his childhood friend with her red hair covering her right eye.

“Are you okay already? Actually, can you even tell who I am?”

“Uhhh, yeah. I’m okay now. My memories from the last few years are still a little fuzzy, but I do remember you, Zagan.”

It appeared that Andrealphus had kept his word and properly saved her.

He gets on my nerves, but he really is the head of the Archdemons, huh?

He was honestly grateful for this.

“...Those robes... you a sorcerer?”

“Just in appearance. Just, you know, girly clothes don’t really suit me anymore, I’m also in debt to my teacher, so these do just fine.”

“Is that how it works...?”

“That’s exactly how it works.”

The fact that they could talk just as they did before was a great relief to Zagan. And yet, Stella lips twisted into a massive grin.

“More importantly, Zagan. You gotta tell me. You got a girlfriend, right? She’s so cute. You gotta introduce her to your big sister properly, you know? And what’s with that kid? You’ve got the look of a dad plastered on your face there.”

“Gaah! Get off my back! Of course I look like a dad! Foll’s my daughter!”

“Waaah? Daughter? You? Huh? She’s so big already... um, isn’t that a little weird?”

Apparently Foll had yet to be introduced to her. Zagan pushed back his self-proclaimed big sister, who was even spitting, such was the vigor of her questions.

Seriously. I’ve gotten so many presents today they won’t all fit in my pockets even if I use sorcery...

And looking over that scene play out, a shady voice rang out from the darkness.

“Hnnngh! Nice love power! This was worth staking my life on...!”

The fact that a pool of blood was forming in the darkness is a story for another day.



The party had started while Zagan and the others were outside exchanging gifts. Barbatos had finally resolved to show himself after milling about in confusion in a corner of the garden, trying to think of a way to talk with Chastille.

“Barbatos, there you are. Tell me if you’re displeased with me in some way. I want to talk about it properly.”

“Hah? The hell are you going on about all of a sudden?”

“I mean, you won’t even look me in the eye today. Even I can tell that something’s up.”

“No, that’s ‘cause...”

“I-Is it because I smell of sweat?”

“What? No, that’s no really it... actually, ain’t that a good point?”

“...Huh?”

The man happened to have a present in his pocket, but judging from the current flow, it would be quite some time before he handed it over.

At another table, Lilith was looking at Selphy in exasperation,

who was in terrifically high spirits from all the good food. She then began buttering Lilith up as she knocked back a glass of wine.

“Lilith, where are those totally awesome frozen sweets you were making? I’ve been like, looking forward to it all day!”

“Selphy... isn’t it obvious that dessert comes last? As royalty, you should start by enjoying some wine at such... hic.”

“Lilith?! Why are you having wine when you totally can’t drink at all?!”

The person in question had no resistance to alcohol at all, and had already collapsed.

At yet another table, Stella and Lisette were picking at the giant lineup of food.

“It’s kinda weird,” Lisette muttered before saying, “Everyone’s dressed different and from different races, but they’re all having fun together.”

“You’re right. It looks like Zagan’s managed to stand all on his own even without his big sister around.”

“It’s lonely... when your big sister... is gone...” Lisette replied with a sincere expression as Stella looked at Zagan with a lonely gaze.

“Heheh. You’re such a good girl Lisette. Well, I guess I’ll look over my now grown up little brother for a while longer.”

Love power was building in the air, and at the dead center of the party, a scream broke out.

“Chief! Why is Kuu the only one wearing a swimsuit?!”

“Oh come on, Gremory had them all prepared last time, but you were the only one who didn’t get a chance to wear one, right? Besides, they’ve got sorcery heating up the place, so it’s not even cold!”

“It’s not okay just ‘cause it’s not cold... Kuroka, save meeee!”

Manuela and some Angelic Knights came by before anyone knew it.

“I am satisfied as long as Lady Nephteros is pleased.”

The Angelic Knight Richard also dropped by, but seeing Nephys and Nephteros laughing together, he kept his distance as to not get in their way.

Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, and Gremory, now in the form of a beautiful woman, was gazing over them from the shadow of a tree.

“The world is beautiful, and overflowing with love power.”

“...Miss Gremory. What are you doing all the way over here?”

Kimaris said in an exasperated voice.

“Mrr... Kimaris? Do not get in the way of my moment of bliss.”

Gremory turned away in a huff and puffed out her cheeks in anger.

Good grief. Just how much needless worry do you think you caused

me?

Gremory was uncharacteristically shaken upon hearing the name Shere Khan. She thought that maybe he would turn back to the way he was back then. Kimaris let out a helpless sigh, then sat down next to her.

"I won't go off anywhere, I'm here by your side. I just became a little engrossed in my stroll today."

"...Hmph."

Well, he did at least deserve praise for properly returning, so Gremory pulled a pendant out from her pocket. It was the fang pendant that she had discovered in the shop that afternoon when she bumped into Nephys's group, and she just chucked it at Kimaris.

"A stray like you needs to wear something like this."

"A pendant?"

"It's a collar fitting for you!"

"Pfft, your present for this year's Alshiera Imera is certainly cute. Thank you very much."

"Gaah! I'm telling you that's not what it is!"

Kimaris strained a smile at their annual exchange, and then began digging into his own pocket.

"Here, this is from me. I do hope it matches your tastes, Miss Gremory."

His gift was a small bottle of perfume.

Like you could possibly make any mistakes with your sense of smell. How shameless... Gremory thought with a smile.

There had never been a scent that didn't match Gremory's tastes out of anything Kimaris ever chose for her. Gremory opened the lid to the bottle in a false show of irritation, and fanned it over herself.

"Hmph. How is it?"

"Great. It suits you very well."

"That's what you always say."

Gremory faced away and leaned back against the lion, and Kimaris strained another smile.



"You're wearing quite the strange outfit today."

As a butler, Raphael was required to wait on the guests. He only called out to his daughter who came back to the castle with Zagan when it came time to bring out dessert. Upon realizing it was him, Kuroka's triangular ears twitched.

"Lord Raphael?"

"Mm. Are you enjoying your meal?"

"Yes... Although, I've had all sorts of people talking to me today, so I haven't really eaten much."

"I thought that would be the case."

Raphael already had several different foods lined up on a plate for her at the ready. After cutting them up into easy to eat pieces, he held out a fork. Kuroka opened her mouth, completely accustomed to this, and bit down on the food.

“It’s delicious.”

“Mm. The damn cooks of the castle have certainly improved.”

After their brief exchange, Raphael sat down next to her in silence. Kuroka then lifted the hems of her skirt, remembering his original comment.

“Oh yeah. I don’t really know what kind of clothing I’m wearing right now...”

“It’s a black dress. It matches your hair. You look beautiful.”

“...Mom... said the same thing.”

“...I see.”

And once more they were silent.

However, there was no sense of awkwardness between them. It was a silence born from Raphael biting down on the fact that the girl he considered his daughter was growing up.

“Lord Raphael... Actually, there’s something I want to ask...”

“Before that, you there, scoundrel, do you have business with me?”

Raphael sensed a gaze from somewhere, and spotted a sorcerer staring at them.

My liege’s subordinate who’s stationed at Archdemon Palace...? No... the church.

“Mister Shax?”

Apparently Kuroka knew who this was. Well, they did work at the same church. So it was only obvious in a sense.

The sorcerer, Shax, replied in an awkward tone.

“I just wanna have a chat with the little missy there, do you mind?”

“...Hmm?”

Raphael cocked his head to the side, searching for the meaning behind those words, and for some reason, Shax began trembling violently. Apparently Raphael was making a very overbearing expression. Kuroka then spoke up to hold Raphael back.

“This man is my benefactor. There was a bit of an incident in town today, and I was in his care.”

“I see. Then just say that’s who you are to begin with.”

“I mean, I totally thought you were going to kill me?”

Well, that sort of reaction from people he just met was the same as usual.

“It’s the first time I’ve heard dad make such a scary voice.”

...Apparently people he knew for a while also reacted that way

today. Raphael got up from his seat, and Shax let out a sigh of relief and put on an exhausted smile.

“Yo. Long time no see... though I guess you wouldn’t remember.”

“No... I do remember a little. We met five years ago, right?”

Shax scratched the back of his head helplessly.

“Yeah. It’s not really something to talk about at a party, but I don’t really know when we’ll get another chance. Will you hear me out?”

“...Yes.”

Kuroka’s expression stiffed up from the tension as well, and before long, Shax gave in and began explaining.

“I was... at your village five years ago. We were... the ones to burn it down.”

Raphael’s eyes shot open upon hearing this. But, Kuroka looked to have anticipated it already, and didn’t show any signs of being greatly shaken by the news. She tightly gripped her skirt as she replied.

“Why... did you attack us?”

“...Who knows? Maybe we just wanted sacrifices or something?”

“You don’t know?”

“...I don’t. It’s ‘cause I’m an idiot. I just followed him without thinking about it... and that happened.”

Kuroka let out a sigh.

“Now that you’ve told me this... what do you want me to do?”

“...That’s for you to decide. You can just slit my throat with your favorite short sword, or if that’s not enough, you can just slug me to death. All I’m saying is... your revenge is standing right here.”

This man was here for atonement. Even Raphael didn’t know what Kuroka was planning to do to this man, nor did he know what was the correct thing to do.

In the end, I am also just a murderer.

Nevertheless, was it something he should stop her from doing? And while Raphael worried about what to do, Kuroka pulled a short sword from her cane.

“...Understood. Have you resolved yourself?”

“Yeah. Do as you like.”

The man didn’t avert his gaze from Kuroka’s blade at all. And then, Kuroka brought her sword straight down at him... and a dull thud rang out.

“Ow?!”

Kuroka sent the flat of her blade crashing down on Shax’s head.

“Are you satisfied with that?”

“Huh...? Satisfied? What are you...”

“I don’t resent you after all this time. My revenge ended a long time ago already, anyway. I’ve properly... come to grips with it now.”

Kuroka then knelt down in front of Shax, who was squatting with his hands on his head.

"I don't know what you're thinking, but I'm not unfortunate. It's not like I haven't been blessed all my life. I've met people who helped me, people who saved me, people who accepted me, and people who supported me."

Raphael now knew that all his worries were needless anxiety.

Kuroka is already a grown woman...

She overcame her past with her own strength. Kuroka then held Shax's hand.

"But, if you're going to listen to my own selfishness, I do have one request of you."

"A request...?"

"Yes." Kuroka replied, with a clear smile on her face. "I've decided to have my eyes healed."

It was apparently possible for Nephy to heal Kuroka's eyes. This was something Raphael knew as well.

"But, I'm still a little scared. So when I get treated, I'd like you to be there by my side."

"...Yeah, sure. I promise," Shax replied with a worn out smile, "You'll surely be okay."

With that, Shax stood back up to his feet.

"Sorry for getting in the way, Chief. I'm done here."

"Hmph. Have you said your fill?"

Shax nodded, then turned back toward Kuroka.

"See you later Blacky."

And with that one word, Kuroka stiffened up completely.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-You noticed?!"

"Oh, so you are. I just realized right now, though."

Kuroka turned bright red and began wailing on the sorcerer's back. She was far too shaken to put any strength in her arms though, so it only looked like a kitten playing around. And with such a harmless scene playing out before him, Raphael was able to put on a natural smile. It wasn't the smile of a fiendish villain, but one of an affectionate father. Such was the case, but both Shax and even Kuroka were completely shocked.

"Um... dad...?"

"Hm? What?"

"Why are you drawing your sword...?"

Raphael had drawn his Sacred Sword from his left arm before he even realized it.

"It isn't a problem. I shall simply inform my liege that Shax has gone far away."

"Wait a sec, Chief. You're joking, right? I didn't really do anything

bad just now, right?”

“I am simply human. There are times when I’ll lose myself in emotion. Thus, burn him to ash, Metatron.”

Flames shot out of the sacred sword, and Shax scooped up Kuroka as he dashed off.

“You’re screwing with me, right?! We’re getting out of here, Blacky!”

“Eek! Why me too?!”

“You won’t get away.”

Carrying Kuroka off was just adding fuel to the fire, but unfortunately enough, Shax didn’t realize this. And so, on this holy evening, sacred flames beautifully soared through the sky.



“What the hell are they doing...?”

Zagan watched the turmoil going on with Raphael from a distance with a sigh. All Shax and Kuroka had to do was get away from each other, but apparently that thought never came to mind and he just continued to run away while carrying her around.

He’s got guts, but he really is a dumbass...

A truly disappointing man. However, Zagan did understand Raphael’s feelings on this matter. His daughter finally had come to see him, and upon reuniting with her, he was shown such a scene. It was only natural to see it as some sort of pest chasing after his daughter. And as he strained a smile, he suddenly felt extreme anxiety over the matter.

Huh? I feel like that’ll be exactly what I look like if Foll brought back some pest...?

This very scene may in fact be Zagan’s future. And with that anxiety weighing on his mind, he heard a sweet giggle coming from the darkness.

“That’s quite the long face your making, Silver-Eyed King.” It was Alshiera. “There’s a party going on, so why are you all the way out here on your own?”

“I just went off on my own to enjoy a smoke from my pipe. It’s delicious, but it isn’t something to smoke while others are enjoying a meal. More importantly...”

It felt pleasant to exhale the tobacco, but it had quite a quirky smell to it. It was entirely possible to completely ruin a meal with it. There was no way he could do something so crass when his subordinates were enjoying the banquet of food, even more so since it was a party Foll had organized.

Zagan returned Alshiera’s gaze, and spotted a wine glass in the giggling vampire’s hand.

“Is that wine? I thought vampires only drank blood.”

"It's enough to distract oneself from hunger is all."

"Hmm. Do you even have a sense of taste?"

"Even vampires have a palate, you know?"

Zagan didn't know whether it was the same as a human's, but she didn't show any signs of finding it unappetizing at the least. He found the sight of a vampire consuming anything other than blood quite peculiar, and after observing her for a while longer, Alshiera muttered in a bitter tone.

"Were you the one to make that man's arm?"

"Foll was the one to give it to him, the device hidden within was made by me."

"...I see. Well, you *are* the one who inherited Marchosias' legacy."

What an unpleasant vampire...

The function to stow away Raphael's Sacred Sword within his artificial arm and the ability to shoot a pseudo-dragon's breath out were both ideas he gained from Marchosias' legacy. There were several tools within the preceding Archdemon's legacy perhaps best referred to as magitech, a combination of a magical apparatus and a mechanical contraption.

Zagan had analyzed the technology behind them and applied his learnings to Raphael's artificial arm. However, Zagan was still a sorcerer. It didn't feel good to have his secrets pried into and seen through completely like that.

Hang on, the power Alshiera used back there was also kind of like magitech wasn't it?

It was a power similar to Heaven's Phosphor which engulfed the horde of undead. The tools used to produce that phenomenon were similar to the way Raphael's arm could shoot Orobas' breath. Both of them used firing mechanisms to unleash a projectile made of mana. And just to check, Zagan feigned ignorance as he muttered back.

"Does it annoy you? I don't know what you call them, but those weapons of yours probably use the same damned technology."

"They're Seraph Hunters. To begin with..."

Alshiera began speaking, but froze up completely.

"I see," Zagan replied with a mischievous smile. Then, he said, "Seraph Hunters, huh? I thought they were quite similar to something that was described in Marchosias' legacy, but to think they were one and the same."

Alshiera surely noticed that she was tricked, and used her stuffed doll to hide her face.

"...Alas. What a day it's been. I've been tricked by such a simple hand."

This vampire was one to just dodge every question that came at her. It may have been the first time that she was tricked like this.

“It’s peculiar for a projectile weapon not to depend on sorcery. Is there a reason it doesn’t?”

Alshiera let out a sigh of resignation.

“It’s because... it comes from an age when sorcery didn’t yet exist.”

“...What do you mean?”

“It’s not like sorcery existed since the dawn of time, you know? Back when sorcery had yet to be discovered, tools were developed to fire arrows and bullets using springs and a substance known as gunpowder.”

It was an unthinkable story at this point in time. Bows and crossbows existed even now, but they were only used by brigands who didn’t hire sorcerers. They didn’t work against sorcerers who could protect themselves with barriers anyway, and they couldn’t even surpass a sorcerer’s reflexes to begin with.

A pebble tossed by a sorcerer possessed more power, and they couldn’t match the range or speed of the fire and lightning born of sorcery. It was far more efficient to just hire a sorcerer than bother with maintaining some troublesome bow when it came to killing others.

And before any of that even mattered, projectiles had no effect at all within a sorcerer’s domain. That’s why Angelic Knights went out of their way to wear sturdy Anointed Armor and challenged them with blades. So in this age, projectile weapons like bows were largely cast aside and held little purpose outside of being a hobby for the rich.

Alshiera peaked out over her stuffed doll and muttered a reply.

“That power is no longer required in this world.”

The vampire’s expression was saying that she didn’t even want to remember such a thing. And giving her a sidelong glance, Zagan felt that he may have gone too far. As such, he crossed his arms and snorted.

“Hmph. I believe otherwise. They were fired and saved my subordinate. The necessity of any power depends on who uses it.”

Alshiera stared back in wonder for a moment, and the faintest of smiles creeped up on her face, giving a peek of her fangs.

“Is it... fine to use it like that?”

And she pointed over to the party. Raphael was still chasing Shax around. It was now at the point where if someone didn’t stop him, someone would really die. A bead of sweat ran down Zagan’s cheek. And then, Foll ran over to him. Unleashing the Sacred Sword’s flames really was going too far. She had one hand on her waist and scolded the old man as he then reluctantly stowed his sword.

“Oh my, the little dragon sure has grown into a reliable girl.”

“Of course she has. She’s my daughter.”

Praise for his daughter made him happy, even from a vampire.

"I would have liked to show the Silver-Eyed King how you are right now..."

"...What do you mean?"

This girl was the one who called him Silver-Eyed King all the time, and here she was referring to another. Alshiera simply smiled like she always did, and didn't reply. Instead, she raised her glass and whispered.

"Well, just think of it as a clever birthday present for me."

"...? Hey, it's your birthday today?"

"Oh my, I've made a slip of the tongue once more. Well, not that it really matters."

The profile of her muttering, unable to truly find the meaning behind any of it, for some reason reminded Zagan of Gremory. Even if she was one who turned into a little girl, these two weren't really similar in any way, but... thinking of it just a little, it reminded him of the moments that granny lost her presence of mind, despite doing whatever it was she wanted all the time.

Shall I test it out a little?

Zagan tapped the ashes out of his pipe, spread out his mantle, and turned toward the party.

"You're drinking wine at our party. Come with me for a bit."

"My, my, an invitation from the Silver-Eyed King himself? How delightful. Will you dance with me?"

"Something like that."

"...?"

Taking along Alshiera as she tilted her head in confusion, Zagan cut into the ongoing party.

"Do you lot have a minute?"

The first to energetically wave at him was Selphy.

"Oh! Welcome back Mister Zagan! How'd you like the taste of the *kiseru*?"

"Just what I would expect of a pipe chosen by Nephy. The taste is marvelous."

"Yay! Looks like it was totally worth getting a job to buy it, huh, Miss Nephy? He said it was marvelous!"

"...Selphy... that's embarrassing."

Nephy covered her face as Selphy cheerfully slapped her back. This was normally where Lilith would raise a big fuss and stop her, but apparently she had managed to get her hands on some strong liquor. She was sprawled across a table and wasn't moving.

Next, an avian woman came floating over, flapping her wings noisily. It was the clerk from their usual clothing store, Manuela.

"Hmmm? Hey Zagan, is that another new girl? Her taste in clothes

is pretty good too. Are you maybe the one who picked Kuroka's clothes?"

"Oh my, what a lovely little birdie. I could just eat you up. Being praised isn't all that bad now is it? They're just something I gave her on the spur of the moment."

She then glanced over to Kuroka.

"They're not really clothes though, more of a part of my body..." she whispered.

So those aren't clothes, but something like a flock of bats and shadows?

He thought it wasn't just a regular dress due to the strange mana they contained, but he never thought that was why.

And with Alshiera's typical arrogant smile before her, in an unusual turn, Manuela looked to be at a loss.

"Grrr, how guarded. But, an artisan's spirit is one that fires up all the more at a greater challenge!"

"Come now, wait just a moment, comrade Manuela."

Manuela began wriggling her fingers suspiciously when unexpectedly, Gremory cut in and stopped her.

"My liege has something to say. First, we must listen."

"Oh yeah. It's time for Zagan to show off his skills, huh? Show me the talent that charmed comrade Gremory!"

Alshiera's smile was now cramped from being surrounded by two perverts. In any case, Zagan had created the atmosphere. He spread his arms out in a bombastic matter and directed all attention to Alshiera.

"Several of you already know, but this here is a vampire called Alshiera. Both Kuroka and Shax are indebted to her. I'd like you all to consider her a guest of honor tonight."

Alshiera didn't seem to expect such a courteous introduction and was left staring in wonder. And with all eyes on her, Alshiera tried to gloss it all over by bringing her wine glass to her lips.

"It seems that today is Alshiera's birthday. Congratulate her."

"PFFFFT!"

Alshiera's wine went spraying all over.

"S-Silver-Eyed King?"

"What's the matter? Are you not Kuroka and Shax's savior? We must celebrate."

Zagan ignored the faltering vampire and clapped his hands. His subordinates were bewildered at first, and impossibly enough, the most reliable one here was Selphy.

"Yaaay! Happy birthday Miss Alshiera! I like, saw you a bunch back home, right? I'm Selphy! Nice to meet'cha!"

Lilith's consciousness was apparently drawn back by Selphy's

shouting, and she hazily got back up.

“Lady Alshiera’s... birthday...? I-I must celebrate! Congratulations! Congratulations! M-May you have a wonderful day!”

Lilith was on the verge of tears, clapping her hands as if spurred on by some sort of compulsion.

“H-Hold on, calm down. Aren’t you two my cute little fawns?”

Next, Foll began clapping her hands enthusiastically.

I thought she went through something horrible because of Alshiera in Liucaon...?

There was no way Foll had forgotten. However, the gaze she pointed at Alshiera was completely pure.

“Congratulations. Birthdays... are meant to be celebrated.”

“U-Ugh...”

She really couldn’t oppose such a pure gaze, and Alshiera finally shrank back with a groan. And as if to further corner her, next it was Kuroka who began clapping.

“You really did save me today. Thank you very much. I can never thank you enough... Come on, you too Mister Shax.”

“Hey, cut it out Blacky. The chief’s looking this way with a super relaxed look. I’m gonna get killed... Dammit, whatever, I get it! Happy birthday missy!”

Kuroka pulled him along by the arm, and Shax turned completely pale. He then screamed out at the top of his lungs. And with that as a trigger, Chastille clapped her hands and began singing.

“Happy birthday, to you.”

“Erk! I-I shall take my leave here!”

“Wait. My subordinates want to give you their thanks. Accept it.”

Alshiera tried to turn into bats and run away, but Zagan grabbed her by the nape of her neck and stopped her. This apparently caused her transformation to fail, and after returning to her form as a girl, she began squirming about to try and escape.

“Happy Birthday, Miss Alshiera.”

“Ummm... Congratulations. Alshiera.”

Nephy, followed by a somewhat awkward looking Nephteros, joined in on the chorus.

Alshiera finally gave up on running away and stopped squirming. Taking a closer look at her, her face was beet red and she had tears in her eyes, despite being undead. Nevertheless, it surely wasn’t something bad. Her face was saying that she didn’t know whether she should laugh or be angry, but it certainly did appear like she was smiling.

“Nice love power! Now that’s my king!”

“A strike by excessive praise using a wave of attacks...! I see, so that means also exists. That’s really impressive, Zagan.”

Gremory and Manuela also began clapping and throwing in their adoration.

Normally Zagan would get angry, not wanting their praise to begin with, but just for today, he was in a good mood.

“Hnnngh! Even this is all your fault! Brother!”

And on this holy evening, Alshiera’s indescribable shriek rang out pleasantly into the night sky.



Afterword

Long time, no see. I've come to deliver *An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride* volume 8. My name is Fuminori Teshima.

After enjoying swimsuits and yukatas on the island of everlasting summer, we're now moving to Christmas! We thought the granny would be the one in high spirits once again, but Gremory's not the only with plans up her sleeves. And during the event, Kuroka becomes a cat, gets picked up by a hopeless guy, and is being chased by monsters!

Anyway, that's how the Christmas volume goes. Having said that, this is a fantasy world, so the origin of the celebration is different. It's actually closer to Halloween or Easter, I guess. I ended up mixing all sorts of things together, so we've got Santa and ghosts too. Oh, and apparently, it's even an important day for vampires.

Nevertheless, things were quite difficult this time around. I mean, Christmas had to stay hidden from Zagan, but the surprise would have been ruined if he'd simply dropped by the church, or if he'd just met up with Shax, and even Barbatos would have ended up consulting him about presents too.

Anyhow, I had ideas like putting Zagan and Richard together, or having Gremory and Alshiera hit it off, but I ended up avoiding those. It would've been like making a time jump all on my own.

We ended up with a story where many groups were moving independently instead. How did you enjoy it? To me, it's cute, like some sort of troublesome child, so I do hope you had fun.

Oh, also, volume 2 of the manga has gone on sale, so please check that out as well.

Now then, I didn't get all that many pages this time around, so let's move on to thanking everyone who supported me.

To the one who was responsible for the book, and reminded me that I forgot about Santa Claus and helped brainstorm ideas, K. To the illustrator, COMTA, who was forced to draw yet another costume change. To the manga artist, Hako Itagaki. To the chief editor at Comic Fire. To everyone who helped with the cover design, proofreading, publicity, and such. To all the modelers I met at the convention. To my children, who bring me so much cheer in one way or another. And to you, my dear readers, who have taken this book in your hand. Thank you very much!

March 2019: On a morning where I thought, ‘Oh yeah, it’s my birthday soon.’ — Fuminori Teshima

Bonus Short Stories

A Present for Alshiere Imera

“A present... for Alshiere Imera?” Nephy asked as she cocked her head, which made her friend Manuela let out a heavy sigh.

“Haaah... So you really don’t know about it. Alshiera Imera is a church festival that has a custom where you give gifts to your lover or other people you’re intimate with.”

“S-Such an event exists?! Wh-What should I do? I didn’t prepare anything for Master Zagan.”

“So being called his lover no longer makes you a nervous wreck... Oh, sorry, don’t mind me,” Manuela said as she shook her head with a charmed look. Nephy was trying to keep a straight face, but the tips of her ears were bright red and shaking.

A present for Master Zagan... I wonder what would please him?

Putting it bluntly, she felt like no matter what she gave him, Zagan would be happy about it. That was just the sort of person he was. However, that wasn’t enough to satisfy her. After all, even Zagan surely had something he wanted.

“Hmm, let’s see. What does Zagan usually do? I guess research sorcery?” Manuela asked as she began flapping her wings about as if she had read Nephy’s mind.

“Yes. He spends a fair amount of time researching sorcery. Lately, he’s been reading picture books to Foll too, and... he’s been looking for someone. But it seems he’s happiest when he discovers some new sorcery... Oh, in that case, should I get him a grimoire? If only I could help with his search...”

“Calm down, Nephy. That doesn’t work as a present from a lover. That’s too sorcerer-like.”

Nephy was ignorant in the ways of ordinary life. Even the simple thought of how lovers usually behaved was outside the realm of her imagination. And just as she was about to fall to her knees in a crestfallen manner, she suddenly remembered something.

“Oh! There is one thing. Something that Master Zagan unexpectedly seemed to take a liking to.”

“...Thank goodness. So the two of you have proper human desires, huh?!” Manuela exclaimed, seemingly moved to tears, which made Nephy cock her head to the side.

“Oh, I don’t know how much it costs, though.”

I guess if I plan to buy a present, I need money, right?

Nephy did at least possess enough money to cover for her daily life, but that was given to her by Zagan. She wanted to earn the money used on a present for him on her own.

"Nephy. I know a part-time job you can take during the day that pays pretty well. Want me to introduce you?"

"Please do!"

And so, Nephy's first ever secret from Zagan was born.

A Present from a Child

"Gremory, what's Arsura Imeera?" Foll asked in a childish tone, making the old granny let out a sharp chuckle in turn.

"Mmm! To think I would hear such words from Lady Foll's own mouth. Are you curious?"

"Yeah... Lilith and Selphy seemed to be having fun when they were talking about it, but I didn't really get it when I asked them."

"Hmm, let's see," Gremory muttered before nodding and saying, "I suppose for children, it's a day where you're treated to a nice meal and receive presents come nighttime. Originally, it was the day where the dead return, so you can say it's a festival for welcoming them."

"A present..." Foll innocently reacted to that word, which made Gremory squint her eyes cheerfully.

"Keeheehee, and what is it that you want, Lady Foll?"

"Well, I don't really want anything."

"Huh? Why? Isn't this the point where you look at me with upturned eyes and beg for something?" Gremory began panicking for some reason, but Foll simply shook her head.

"I've gotten tons of present, so I want to give some... to Zagan and Nephy."

Foll had received many things from them ever since they became her parents. And they were all things the two of them didn't possess themselves when they were her age. As such, she didn't just want to remain on the receiving end. She wanted to repay their kindness with gifts of her own. Foll felt that way from the bottom of her heart, but she also knew the two of them would look upon that idea unfavorably.

But... the two of them might be happy if it's a present for a festival.

And with that, the old granny was pinning down her chest with a look of ecstasy plastered on her face.

"Hnnngh! What astounding love power! I couldn't predict such an answer at all. Lady Foll, I shall assist you! Now tell me, what do you plan on giving them?"

"I haven't decided yet. What do you think will make them happy?"

“Let’s see... In my opinion, what you want to give them is not necessarily a physical object, but something that they do not possess. Like a normal life, right? The problem is what exactly ‘normal life’ is.”

Both Foll and Gremory were sorcerers, so neither of them understood much about a normal person’s life.

“Oh, I got it. Gremory, so smart.”

Foll whispered her idea in Gremory’s ear, and blood began dribbling out of the granny’s nose as a result.

“Nice love power! Let’s do that!”



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An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride: Volume 8
by Fuminori Teshima

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